

50

ONE ACT PLAYS

II SERIES

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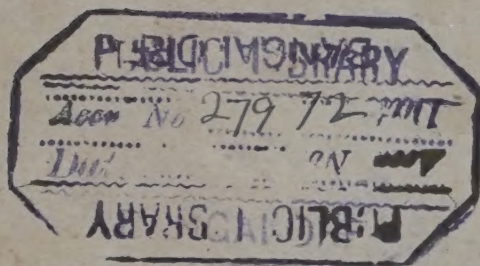
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EDITED BY CONSTANCE M. MARTIN

# FIFTY ONE-ACT PLAYS

SECOND SERIES

BY

BAX  
BELL  
BENAVENTE  
BERKELEY  
BOTTOMLEY  
BRIDIE  
BRIGHOUSE  
CANNAN  
CARTER  
CHAPIN  
CHEKHOV  
CONNELLY  
CORRIE  
DRAKE-BROCKMAN  
DREISER  
DUNSANY  
EVREINOV  
GLOVER  
GRANT  
GREEN  
GREGORY  
HODSON  
HOUSMAN  
HUGHES  
JOHN

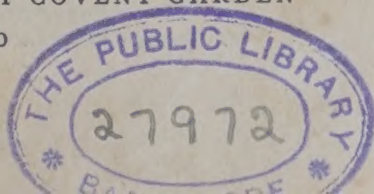
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O'CASEY  
O'NEILL  
PHILLPOTTS  
PIRANDELLO  
RAMSAY  
ROBINSON  
RUBINSTEIN  
"SAKI"  
SCHNITZLER  
SLADEN-SMITH  
TAGORE  
TALBOT  
WATSON  
WILDE  
YEATS

LONDON

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1940



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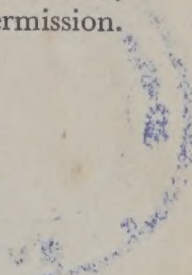
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Clifford Bax

THE CLOAK

*A Play*

## CHARACTERS

AN ANGEL

AN UNBORN SPIRIT

ONE NEWLY DEAD

*This play was first produced at the ALDWYCH THEATRE, LONDON, in July 1922, by the TRAVELLING THEATRE of the ARTS LEAGUE OF SERVICE with the following cast:*

<i>An Angel</i>	—	—	—	—	—	ELEANOR ELDER
<i>An Unborn Spirit</i>	—	—	—	—	—	JUDITH WOGAN
<i>One Newly Dead</i>	—	—	—	—	—	SARA ALLGOOD

“The Cloak” is now available in *Seven One-Act Plays*, published by Penguin Books, Ltd., at 6d.

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SCENE: *A green height among rocks. Entrances right and left. Back centre, a natural seat. On this an ANGEL is seated.*

THE ANGEL (*remaining seated*):

There is a time for laughter, and a time  
For serious thought and solemn-pacing rhyme.  
We do not purpose now to bring you mirth  
But rather, if we can,  
To show how strange is Man,  
And what it is that cankers life on earth.

First then, I pray you all to understand,  
Our stage, our scenery, represents no land  
That ship or train might come to, but instead  
A world of spirits,—the unborn and the dead.  
Next, of ourselves, the players,—let us be  
Imagined out of our mortality:  
For those who speak our play  
Will not be flesh and blood, not mortal clay,  
But spirits,—the first, unborn, eager for breath  
And pure; the second, wakening after death.  
So much I tell you that our words may win  
Full comprehension. . . . Let the play begin.

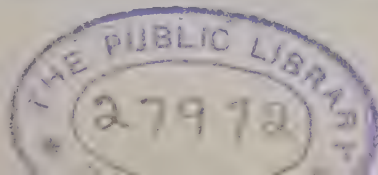
[*She rises, and looks out left. Enter, right, THE UNBORN, groping her way like someone in a dark room. THE ANGEL, hearing her, turns.*

THE UNBORN:

Lost,—I am lost ! Which way ? Where is the track ?  
Should I push onward blindly, or turn back ?  
Which way ? I cannot see  
One inch in front of me,—  
Or does the darkness only seem so great  
Because I come from heaven ? If I should wait  
A little here, my sight  
May slowly learn to use this weaker light. . . .

---

All applications for permission to perform this play must be made to Messrs. Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2; *or*, for South Africa, to Messrs. Samuel French, Ltd., P.O. Box 497, Nairobi; *or*, for Canada, to Messrs. Samuel French (Canada), Ltd., 480 University Avenue, Toronto; *or*, for the U.S.A., to Messrs. Samuel French, Inc., 25 West 45th Street, New York City, *or* 811 West 7th Street, Los Angeles.





Yes, it was true : the place begins to grow  
 Upon my sense. It is a mountain-pass  
 With heaven's blue peaks above me, and, below,  
 Abysms of flowery grass.  
 Have I indeed come downward all that way  
 And in so brief a time ? I cannot, then,  
 Be very far now from the world of men  
 Where once I was and whither, if I may,  
 I would return to-day.

Does memory play me tricks, or will these eyes  
 Meet there with beauty more than they can drink ?  
 For I remember, or at least I think  
 I can remember, dark woods and clear skies,  
 Diamonds of morning sunlight on the sea  
 And sunsets, too, that were  
 Like paradise dissolving into air,  
 And men and women happy, kind and wise.  
 O to be once more back on earth,—to be  
 Woman or man once more !  
 But how to guess which pathway to explore ?

THE ANGEL :

The earth is one day distant.

THE UNBORN :

Who is here ?

An Angel !

THE ANGEL : Yes.

THE UNBORN :

While I am still so near  
 To heaven, I greet you after the sweet way  
 Of those with whom I walked but yesterday.

[*They kiss.*

I have been sent, dear sister, as you know,  
 To find the world. Tell me which way to go.

THE ANGEL :

Do you *want* life ? Had you not bliss enough ?

THE UNBORN :

I am a jar that heaven has brimmed with love  
 To overflowing. Since I can hold no more,  
 What wonder if I seek to share my store ?

For though my memories of the earth are kind,  
 There must be many things that I forget :  
 And often, with a strangely-puzzled mind,  
 I have heard some that had been lately there  
 Say that men have not yet  
 Made quite the whole world fair as heaven is fair ;  
 And so—perhaps too proudly—I dared hope  
 Love there might still find scope :  
 If I was right, tell me which path to take :  
 Some spirits, I know, when they draw near to earth  
 Are frightened,—frightened just to sleep and wake !  
 I think I never had that fear of birth.

THE ANGEL :

Come, sister. From this peak  
 You can descry that planet which you seek.

THE UNBORN :

Where ? I perceive more stars than I can count,—  
 Like bubbles in the universal night.  
 Which is the earth, I wonder ? That great fount  
 Of leaping flames ?

THE ANGEL :

No. It is far less bright.

It is a little sphere, a humble place,  
 That hardly shows among the suns of space.

You see that mighty globe  
 (Men call her Sirius) with an endless play  
 Of colours like an iridescent robe ?  
 From that look east ; and let your vision probe  
 Beyond the Milky Way.

THE UNBORN :

Beyond, I can see nothing : all is dark.

THE ANGEL :

Look once again.

THE UNBORN :

A fitful glowing spark. . . .  
 Is that the world ?

THE ANGEL :

Why, you have scarce begun  
 To find the world. That is man's blinding sun.

THE UNBORN:

But now I see  
Faint discs that move about it circlewise,—  
Or could they be  
No more than motes within my own strained eyes?

THE ANGEL:

The little third one . . . you can perceive it?

THE UNBORN:

Yes . . .?

THE ANGEL:

That is the earth. . . . How little, how obscure,  
You think; but you shall find there, none the less,  
Great beauty,—and much woe hard to endure.

THE UNBORN:

And what will birth be like?

THE ANGEL:

A gradual sleep,  
A dwindling down, a tidal ebb of strength  
Past all your power to check, until at length,  
Drowned in that life, you wake—to want and weep.

THE UNBORN:

I swear it shall not put out my intent  
Still to be spending love till life be spent.

THE ANGEL:

Myriads go down to earth  
With that resolve,—and you perhaps may find  
Force to maintain it: yet, I warn you, birth  
Contracts the sky-large mind.

THE UNBORN: I pray you, lead me to the next point!

THE ANGEL:

You ask

An hour too soon. I have a harder task.

THE UNBORN:

What is it?

THE ANGEL:

I am waiting here to guide  
The footsteps of a woman who has just died,—  
For when they slip their bodies and, as men say,  
Are dead, all human spirits pass by this way.  
From heaven they go forth simply-clad, like you,  
But, as years pass, they let the whirring brain  
Weave no thoughts but of self-glory and self-gain.

These, though not visibly to their mortal view,  
Become a cloak, a richly-patterned cloak,  
That hides their true selves as a flame in smoke;  
And having worn it (there  
On earth) so long, they will not cast it by,  
But think they are the garment which they wear.  
It is my task to teach her that before  
She enters heaven her separate self must die,  
And she become simple as you once more.

THE UNBORN:  
Grant me a wish !

THE ANGEL:               What is it ?

THE UNBORN:               Let me prove  
That not vaingloriously I spoke of love.  
Depute your task to me,  
And I will set her free !

THE ANGEL:  
That is more difficult than it sounds to be.

THE UNBORN:  
How ? Difficult to prevail on her to cast  
The cloak away, and be herself at last ?

THE ANGEL:  
I grant your wish. . . . And there—  
Look—she comes, not yet freed of earthly care,  
But walking, half-asleep and half-awake,  
Like someone in a dream he cannot break.

*[Enter, left, THE DEAD, wearing over her tunic a cloak that  
bears a complicated design. For some time her tones and  
movements are those of a somnambulist.]*

THE DEAD:  
No,—stay ! You mustn't leave me. . . . Though my  
head  
Is clear of pain and though the fever's gone,  
I cannot think that I am still in bed.  
I feel as if I had been climbing on  
Somewhere from crest to crest,  
And could not stop : and yet I must have rest !

*[She sits on the ground.]*



THE ANGEL (*to THE UNBORN*):

Her thoughts, you see, not being yet clean-cleft,  
Are tangled with that life which she has left.

THE DEAD:

Come near,—

I want to tell you something. Can you hear?

I owe my sister money. She is afraid

That if I'm sick for long it won't be paid.

Do tell her that I *will* pay,—to the last

Penny. I shan't die. This will soon have passed,

Won't it? . . . No answer. . . . Have I fallen asleep?

THE ANGEL (*as before*):

This trance of memory that drugs all her powers

Moment by moment will become less deep.

THE DEAD:

They're just a dream,—the rocks, the sun on high

That, caught in cloud, makes pearl of half the sky,

And those green slopes of never-stirring flowers. . . .

Come,—closer. If she talks of it to-day,

Give her my solemn promise to repay,

Once I am well. Where have you gone? You seem

A thousand miles away,—

And there they rise again, those rocks of dream!

I must fare on. How weak I am! The weight

Even of my cloak begins to grow too great.

[*She rises painfully.*]

THE ANGEL:

Now she has waked. Go forth. Dissolve the spell

That binds her, till she drop her cloak. Speed well!

[*Exit right.*]

THE UNBORN: Sister, I come to help you. . . .

THE DEAD:

Do I need

Help? It has always been my pride to scorn

Dependence upon others,—and, indeed,

Who are you?

THE UNBORN: Why, a spirit as yet unborn.

THE DEAD:

There's no such thing.

THE UNBORN:                      But how  
Can you believe that now?  
Look,—I am here!

THE DEAD:                      Souls without form are things  
Impossible,—like string-music without strings.  
And then—you *have* a form.

THE UNBORN:                      That which I wear  
Now is the pattern of my body there.

THE DEAD:                      There ? On the earth, you mean ?

THE UNBORN:                      I go to-day.

THE DEAD:                      This can't be true . . . ? If you are what you say,  
How, then, of me ?

THE UNBORN:                      Your body has just died.

THE DEAD:                      I—dead ? If that be so,  
How little men yet know,—  
For men have tossed that fairy-tale aside  
These many years ago.

THE UNBORN: Have they ? How strange ! Because *their*  
world, you see,  
Is just as unimaginable to me.

THE DEAD:                      Then I suppose these rocks are heaven !

THE UNBORN:                      Alas,  
Heaven lies a long way from this mountain-pass,  
Which, if I understood  
The Angel rightly, bridges the two worlds.

THE DEAD:                      Good !  
One path must lead to heaven, if heaven there be,  
And that's the path for me.

THE UNBORN:                      You think to undergo that second birth  
Just as you are,—just as you came from earth ?

THE DEAD:

Why not ?

THE UNBORN: So many faculties that have use  
In life, are here grapes that have lost their juice.

THE DEAD:

If I am dead, I have lost my wealth, my fame,—  
And now, in heaven, you tell me, I shall find  
The inflexible will (that made men fear my name)  
And the great learning of my book-built mind  
Mere chaff ? That leaves me just like other folk !  
I say,—I'll enter heaven ! What must I do ?

THE UNBORN:

First,—fling away your cloak.

THE DEAD:

This ? But I worked at this my whole life through,  
Making it from a thousand threads and scraps.  
The intricate design  
Marks me for what I am : and though perhaps  
The world may have a few that are as fine,  
There's none that matches mine !

THE UNBORN:

And yet you cannot come to heaven, I swear,  
Till you have cast it off, however fair.

THE DEAD:

I can't believe you. . . . Why,  
Without this what am I ?

THE UNBORN:

It is a garment merely.

THE DEAD:

No,—much more !

It is the personality that I wore  
So long—my memories—all that I have been :  
And if I lose my cloak, what will it mean ?  
To lose identity, to be but one  
Of millions, like a flame within the sun,—  
Not to be I at all.  
If thus you seek life, let your hope be small !

THE UNBORN:

What do you mean ?

THE DEAD:                    That if you will not wear  
Some garment to impress your fellows there,  
You will go wretchedly to your dying day,  
For every man will push you from his way.

THE UNBORN:  
Do men not help each other ?

THE DEAD:                    Can you be  
So ignorant, and yet would counsel *me* ?  
For you the world will prove a bitter school,  
I warn you, and men count you but a fool.

THE UNBORN:  
How strange to find so rare  
Goodwill that should be general as the air. . . .  
But what of love ? Has it no place with men ?

THE DEAD:  
It is a star—seen and soon lost again.

THE UNBORN:  
They do not now make war ? The world is old.

THE DEAD:  
For some few yards of soil, a little gold !

THE UNBORN:  
Still ? But when war is done,—in days of peace ?

THE DEAD:  
Every man then fights for his own increase.

THE UNBORN:  
Friend against friend ? How can the world advance ?

THE DEAD:  
How ! If at all, not by man's will, but Chance.

THE UNBORN:  
I thought that men were kind of heart and just.

THE DEAD:  
Why should they be ?—thinking themselves mere dust ?

THE UNBORN:  
But they are spirits !

THE DEAD:                    Yet most men squander life  
In fooleries or the stirring up of strife.



THE UNBORN :

Alas, if this be true, I think the earth  
Terrible. I begin to dread my birth.

THE DEAD :

If you remain as simple there as here  
And still think Love the sovereign power through  
Space,  
You will indeed find men, just as you fear,  
A cruel and crafty race  
Who most exalt the heartless and the strong  
And force the gentlest to endure most wrong.  
Be wise,—  
Weave yourself a protection and disguise.  
Of this be sure,—either you must fulfil  
The will of others, or impose your will;  
But if you cast out pity from your heart  
And at the very start  
See what you want, and thrusting others by,  
Snatch it and keep it,—why,  
You may live happy and think the world a play  
Pleasant enough. There is no other way.

THE UNBORN :

I thought to bring Man love—before you spoke. . . .

THE DEAD :

Love and simplicity gain no good on earth.

THE UNBORN :

And that was why you made yourself that cloak. . . .

THE DEAD :

So,—you begin to understand its worth !  
But which path must I take ? All are so sheer. . . .

THE UNBORN :

Till you throw off your cloak you are bound here.

THE DEAD :

Ah,—you grow shrewd ! You purpose, if you can,  
To get it for yourself,—a pretty plan !  
But since you will not tell,  
I'll choose a path at random. Fare you well !

*[She moves right, but her exit is blocked by THE ANGEL.]*

THE ANGEL:

Where would you go ?

THE DEAD:

I seek for heaven.

THE ANGEL:

Your pride

In being yourself must first be thrown aside.

THE DEAD:

You say it, also ? Then in heaven, it seems,  
Our personalities——

THE ANGEL:

Are but earthly dreams.

THE DEAD:

But what of intellect ?

THE ANGEL:

In the spheres above

We learn in subtler ways—and swifter, too—  
Than any known to man.

THE DEAD:

How then ?

THE ANGEL:

We love

Something, and straightway know it through and  
through.

THE DEAD:

My cloak,—it is myself ! And yet you say . . .  
I dare not !

THE ANGEL:

Dare it ! Cast yourself away.

THE DEAD:

No !

THE ANGEL:

Then remain within this middle state  
Till Time have taught you wisdom, and you tire  
Of being yourself.

THE DEAD:

Alas, I cannot wait.

THE ANGEL:

Cast off your cloak.

THE DEAD:

My fear and my desire  
Stand equal. . . . No ! However dread it be,  
I'll do it !

*[She looses her cloak and throws it on to the seat at the back.  
She is now attired simply, like THE UNBORN.]*

I am free !

Now I know *what* joy is, and I come home  
After so long. The universe and I  
Flow to one rhythm,—as the sea bears the foam.  
To the next peak !

THE ANGEL (*turning toward THE UNBORN*):

And you . . . ? Sister,—good-bye !

[THE ANGEL and THE DEAD go out, right. THE UNBORN stands for a moment watching them out of sight: then turns. Her eyes fall upon the cloak.]

THE UNBORN:

My way is harder. She herself made mock  
Of my simplicity, saying the world of men  
Would use me for their drudge and laughing-stock. . . .  
But surely . . . ? If I take her cloak,—what then ?  
Then I myself should be more strong than they,  
More subtle-brained,—the mightiest, not the least. . . .  
I will ! I'll put it on.

[She arrays herself in the cloak.]

Let whoso may  
Content himself with fragments of the feast,  
I'll wring the pleasures of the whole earth dry,  
Rule, not be ruled, give burdens and not bear,  
And all the world shall know that I am I !

[She goes out, left. Enter, right, THE ANGEL.]

THE ANGEL (*going slowly to the seat at the back*):

She failed. . . . It is not there.

[Looking off right.]

But who comes now ? And what shall be her fate ?  
For as they leave that state,  
Some have I seen in whom love was a flame  
So bright that men remembered Whence they came.

Reginald Berkeley

THE QUEEN OF MOTUREA

*A Play*



## CHARACTERS

'ENSHAW

BAXTER MADDISON

RATU BENI MATANITOMBUA (pronounced RATO O BENNY  
MAHTA-NI-TOMBUA)

MA'AFI LITIA WAILANGILALA, QUEEN OF MOTUREA (pro-  
nounced MOTOO-REER)

MR. LORIMER

MRS. HAMILTON CARTER

HENRI

A YOUNG GIRL (mute)

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Moturea, like the kingdom of Tonga and other island communities, is a British Protectorate.

RATU BENI MATANITOMBUA, High Chief of Moturea, was deposed from his throne in 1902 because of his attempt to assert sovereign independence, and was succeeded by his younger brother. After sixteen years' deportation in the Gilbert Islands, he was permitted to return, and soon re-established himself as leader of the chiefs, and a powerful adviser of his niece, the Queen.

SCENE: *The anteroom of the Palace,—large, sparsely furnished, with whitewashed wooden walls and a thatched roof. A reed partition, L., separates the anteroom from the Queen's private apartments, to which there is an entrance down stage through a rush portière. The main door is back centre. Through this, the settlement is seen, with the sea beyond. There is a smaller door, down R.*

*A great high-backed chair, the gift of some long-departed whaling skipper to the reigning chief,—a tremendous, heavy hardwood affair, rather roughly knocked together by the ship's carpenter, which now, from long usage and much oiling and rubbing, shows a fine patine on the wood,—stands on a low mat-covered platform up L., in the corner. This is the throne. There are one or two plain wickerwork armchairs for the use of European visitors, up R. There is a small baize-covered table with an earthenware bottle and glass on it, and a couple of plain office chairs tucked in beside it for the use of native scribes on ceremonial occasions. The earthen floor is covered with mats.*

*Three men are in conversation. BAXTER MADDISON, a heavy-featured American, florid, laconic, gnawing at the inevitable cigar, sits at the small table with his elbows on it, shifting his eyes from one to the other of his companions as they argue. RATU BENI MATANITOMBUA, a huge islander, in whose blurred features the remains of a vigorous, finely-drawn countenance can still be seen, fills a large wicker armchair, which creaks perilously under his bulk. The third man is a specious, rather ferrety-eyed Cockney, who calls himself 'ENSHAW, and who, with the vulgarian's contempt for dark-skinned people, is lounging about with his hands in his pockets and his straw hat on the back of his head.*

ENSHAW (*earnestly*): Look, Beni, you go and get the Queen to come and 'ave a talk with us. Leave the other part to me. I'll see you're looked after. . . . (*Silencing the Chief as he is about to re-open the question*) Leave it to me, I tell you. You know Willie 'Enshaw, don't you?

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All applications for permission to perform this play should be made to the publishers, Messrs. H. F. W. Deane & Sons, The Year Book Press, Ltd., 31 Museum Street, London, W.C.1. Overseas readers should apply as follows: For Canada and the U.S.A., to the Baker International Play Bureau, 178 Tremont Street, Boston, Mass., and 448 South Hill Street, Los Angeles; for South Africa, to Messrs. Darter & Sons, Cape Town; for Australia, to the Sydney Players' Club, Sydney; for New Zealand, to the British Drama League Branch, 172 Featherston Street, Wellington.

The play is published by Messrs. Deane at 1s. net.

RATU BENI: Yes, I know you. But——

'ENSHAW (*interrupting him*): Well, leave it to me, I tell you.

RATU BENI (*giving in*): All right. You my friend! (*Taking his arm and drawing him towards the inner door*) I say—don't forget! You my friend!

'ENSHAW (*as the Chief goes*): 'Aven't I always bin? (*Turning to MADDISON when they are alone*) An' I 'ave, too. Owes me a lot, Beni does. Quite a white man 'e is, for a Kanaka. . . . Now listen to me, Maddison. You let me do the talkin'. You've got to know these people.

MADDISON: Boy, I knew how to deal with niggers when you were eating pap.

'ENSHAW: These ain't ordinary niggers. Don't run away with that idea. 'Course, they're not the equal of a white man, but they're——

MADDISON: Aw, shucks! One black bozo is pretty much the same as another. Treat 'em like the dirt they are, they'll blame soon get to know their master's voice. You can't show me anything on niggers.

'ENSHAW (*earnestly*): Look 'ere, I'm not goin' to 'ave wot I've bin workin' years to get fixed, all mucked up because you're too blooming conceited to be told wot's wot! We agreed in our partnership I was to 'andle the natives and you was to 'andle the finance; and if you're tryin' to go back on it now, it ain't fair. I'd sooner you took your money out, straight I would!

MADDISON (*irritably*): There's no sense talking that way. All I want to know—what's this fellow's graft?

'ENSHAW: Crikey—wot's 'is graft? 'E's pretty dam near the 'ole shootin'-match 'ere. This is the feller the British Government slung out in 1902 for stirring up trouble. Didn't 'arf 'ave a job of it, either. 'E was King, that's all, an' 'e was goin' to chase the white men out of the group and bag all their property. They only 'ad to call in a cruiser, and land about a million bluejackets, before they quieted things down, and then they carted 'im away to one of them God-forsaken islands up north of the Gilberts, an' kep' 'im there till a few years ago.

MADDISON: How does that give him a graft here now? This Queen's the guy we wanna fix.

'ENSHAW: Ain't you brilliant! But I've got 'er—see? Fixed that two years ago when she was at Fiji.

MADDISON: How the hell did you do that?

'ENSHAW: Crikey! I bin workin' on this for years. Ain't left nothin' to chance. I got 'er. Never mind 'ow! But this chap Beni's got to be squared too. I don't mind tellin' you 'e's got the 'ole thing in 'is pocket. I got a pull over 'im, too, if it comes to that. But it takes me to fix it—see? And if you want to stay in on the ground floor of the biggest gold proposition since Western Australia—

MADDISON: Say, buddy, what's this stuff about Western Australia? Cut it right out! We'd buy and sell Western Australia before breakfast over on the goldfields in the States. Never mind about Australia. Come right down to this proposition here. . . .

[RATU BENI *reappears in the doorway.*

RATU BENI: The Queen he come now.

['ENSHAW *plucks off his hat, and MADDISON rises and comes forward.*

*A magnificently handsome native woman in the prime of youth sweeps into the room in a highly coloured assortment of robes. On a European they would all be garish and wrong. On this striking savage their almost grotesque combination of colours seems as inevitable as the plumage of a parrot. This is MA'AFI LITIA WAILANGILALA, High Chiefess, Queen of Moturea, and niece of Rata Beni. Having been educated at a Wesleyan Mission School, she speaks excellent English, with the soft inflection and slight tendency to slur the words common to educated Polynesians.*

*She is attended by A YOUNG GIRL, clad only in a kind of print wrapping, fastened under the arms, who, as soon as THE QUEEN has seated herself, crouches on the floor beside her.*

*As THE QUEEN enters, RATU BENI, standing bolt upright by the door, utters the prescribed homage—"Ndua O!"*

*The two white men bow awkwardly. THE QUEEN seats herself on her throne.*

THE QUEEN: You can sit down, please.

['ENSHAW and MADDISON *sit.* RATU BENI *remains standing.*

RATU BENI: You lika-to say something, Misi Henshaw?



'ENSHAW: That's right, Beni. (*With easy familiarity*) Well, Queen, you know me—eh? I'm sure we're glad to see you lookin' so 'earty. 'This is Mr. Baxter Maddison—you may 'ave 'eard of 'im. Big American chief! Big as me in England, eh? You know—Peritania!

THE QUEEN: I did not know you were so big in England, Misiter Henshaw.

'ENSHAW: Me? . . . You know Willie 'Enshaw, Queen! (*Rather menacing*) You know my 'otels in Sydney an' Auckland an'—Suva!

THE QUEEN: Well—I know. Yes.

'ENSHAW: But I've got much bigger places in England. An' Mister Maddison 'ere—'e owns pretty near the 'ole of 'Onolulu. Is that right, Maddison?

MADDISON: Sure. I've gotten Noo York in my vest pocket!

RATU BENI: I think very good you say what you want—eh?

'ENSHAW: Listen. I'll tell you, Queen. We got a plan, Mr. Maddison and me, for financing a big trading venture right here in these islands. It will bring you plenty money. Plenty plenty money. For you yourself.

THE QUEEN: Why you think I want you money?

'ENSHAW (*abashed*): Well—don't everyone?

THE QUEEN: I don't know! Money all right Siteni—New Zealand. No good here! What for want money here? Plenty food! Very good life. Plenty of swim in the water and catch fish. In the mountains we got lot of pig and cattle. And *uvi* and *kumalo* and *ndalo* and plenty fruit. . . .

'ENSHAW: Well—but I say. This is Socialism! . . . Don't you want civilization? Nice clothes. Pretty presents. . . . 'Ere. What's a boy to do if 'e wants to give 'is girl something? Give 'er a bunch of bananas?

THE QUEEN: I suppose he can give a kiss!

'ENSHAW: Well—but—well, you know best, Mum, I s'pose. But you must 'ave wireless an' gramophones an'—an' all that—

THE QUEEN: You going to sell wireless and gramophones?

'ENSHAW: Well, I'll tell you. We want to develop this

country. Introduce capital. Put up a chain of ware'ouses all round the coast, centralize the management an' let your people 'ave things cheap——

THE QUEEN: But I like do that myself.

MADDISON: What's that?

THE QUEEN: Yes. I made a plan for that—with Misiter Lorimer, Misinary! Run my own stores for my people.

'ENSHAW: But you can't do that, Queen! That's state tradin'! You couldn't make a success of that. Nobody ever 'as done.

MADDISON: Say. Let's get down to brass tacks. This syndicate, Madam—of which I am perhaps the principal member—is prepared to sink good dollars in your country. There's land here—and timber and that—quite undeveloped. Now let me tell you our proposition. There's a block of real estate up—shucks—(To 'ENSHAW) What's the name of the Gard damned place?

'ENSHAW (*sulky*): Kambara.

MADDISON: Sure, that's it. Up Kambara way.

THE QUEEN: Kambara. I know the place, of course. But that no good for plantation. That all rock! What you want that land for?

MADDISON (*glibly*): Well—we kinder think it suitable for development. Maybe we're wrong, but that's our risk. I guess you ought to be better posted in the properties of the soil than we are. But anyway we're in the market to deal on a big scale. The dollars are there. All we ask is full inde-feasible title for all rights and purposes——

THE QUEEN (*cold*): I don't want to sell that land.

'ENSHAW (*delighted*): 'Ave you said your little piece Mr. Maddison? May I speak now?

MADDISON: Aw—hell! I thought you said you had things fixed!

'ENSHAW: Well—one minute. . . . Could I speak to you alone, Queen?

RATU BENI: Wha' for?

'ENSHAW: Well—Beni—I didn't ask you, did I? Look! you go and 'ave a talk to Mr. Maddison. (*With a veiled*

*menace, under his breath*) Look—you know Willie 'Enshaw—eh? You go an' do what I tell you!

RATU BENI (*accepting the situation with a smile*): All ri'! You come, Misi Maddison? You seen the boys catch turtle in the fishfence—swim on he back—eh?

MADDISON: Why, no!

RATU BENI (*buoyantly*): Come on. I show you. You like bottle of beer? You come my house.

[*They go outside together.*]

'ENSHAW (*pointing to THE GIRL at THE QUEEN's feet*): An' the kid, too, Your Majesty.

THE QUEEN (*after a moment's pause*): *Lako yani.\**

[*THE GIRL creeps out on all fours. A little pause.*]

Well . . . what you want to say to me?

'ENSHAW: Listen! We know each other, don't we? No good beatin' about the bush.

THE QUEEN: I know you—yes.

'ENSHAW: 'Course! I knew you'd be sensible. Those was good days in Suva when you used to sneak out of the Mission School at night and come down to my grog shop in All Nations Street. 'Oo was that Tongan kid used to come with you? Atuona† or some such name. . . . You was always particular about your boys too, I must say!

THE QUEEN: Why are you talking about these things?

'ENSHAW: Just remindin' you of the 'appy past!

THE QUEEN: Because you say all this does not mean it was happening.

'ENSHAW: Well—I might 'ave dreamt it all.

THE QUEEN: That is what you have done.

'ENSHAW: That is what I have done—if it's worth my while.

THE QUEEN: That is what you have done in any case. Nobody believes your word against mine. I just give an order and they put you on a boat and you go away. And perhaps someone give you a hiding first!

\* Lukko yani.

† Ahtoo-owner.

'ENSHAW: . . . I 'ear they're talkin' about you gettin' married.

THE QUEEN: Yes? What you can do?

'ENSHAW: Forbid the banns!

THE QUEEN: Like Hell you can! (*Rising*) You come here with your damn lies. I call my guard.

'ENSHAW: Better not lose your temper. I've got the certificate.

[*He shows a paper. She snatches at it. He avoids her.*]

'ENSHAW: Gently. Gently.

THE QUEEN (*panting*): It was a dirty trick! You know that. You help to do it. . . . You give me that paper or true's God I make them kill you.

'ENSHAW: The paper's no good to you. I've got the man. . . .

THE QUEEN: Henri!

'ENSHAW: That's 'im. Your French boy. The kid you was sweet on. (*Ugly*) The one you got spliced to!

THE QUEEN (*much moved*): Henri—here. . . .

'ENSHAW: I tell you. I brought 'im with me. (*She is silent. He attempts an awkward explanation.*) Well . . . you can't blame other people. You done it yourself!

THE QUEEN: These white fools. What was the good to put me in a Mission School with a lot of half-castes? Do they think a chief——? And then punish me with all these common little children. That is not *vaka turanga*,\* Misiter Henshaw! And you say my fault!

'ENSHAW (*philosophic*): Well, it doesn't really matter 'oose fault it is. The thing's 'appened now!

THE QUEEN: The thing happen. Yes. How? You make me *mateni*†—drunk in you damn place. And then when Henri been with me—you say can make it all right. Marry!

'ENSHAW (*virtuously*): I was lookin' after your interests, wasn't I? Protectin' your name!

THE QUEEN: What about my name now?

\* Vukker toorunger.

† Mahtaynee.



'ENSHAW: Look. It can all be arranged. E' can disappear—if it's worth while!

THE QUEEN: But I don't want him disappear. I like to see him—perhaps. . . . (*Suddenly bursting out*) I sick of this place! Got to do what the Resident say or Misiter Lorimer, Misinary. No power. Can't do anything myself. Only talk! . . . Look, Misiter Henshaw. You bring Henri. I go along Siteni—New Zealand—some place—take my husband.

'ENSHAW: Can't do that. There'd be 'ell to pay. (*A thought suddenly striking him*) If you want 'im so much, why not keep 'im here?

THE QUEEN: He is big chief in France—no?

'ENSHAW: 'Ell of a big chief, I should say. Always 'eard it said 'e was a prince or something by rights. . . . You'd 'ave to arrange a new marriage, you know. Couldn't let on you'd been spliced on the quiet. 'Ave you out of 'ere quick, the Resident would, if 'e tumbled to that.

THE QUEEN (*proudly*): The Resident got no power to interfere in my household.

'ENSHAW (*earnestly*): Look 'ere, mum. Get that idea out of your 'ead quick. The Resident can 'ave you out of 'ere in two twos. They 'ad your uncle out in 1902, an' they'll 'ave you out if it suits them. . . . You'd better let 'im disappear quiet.

THE QUEEN (*reflectively*): I think perhaps I tell the Resident.

'ENSHAW (*much alarmed*): Like 'ell you do. 'Ere, you play the game. Think I want the British Government 'avin' a down on me? This my reward for lookin' after your interests? Think of the quids you've 'ad out of me at my place in All Nations Street.

THE QUEEN (*interrupting*): I always pay you back.

'ENSHAW: But I trusted you, didn't I? You want the Resident complainin' to the 'Igh Commissioner, an' gettin' my place shut up. . . . (*Persuasively*) Look, let's forget about this, an' act friendly. It's all above-board. Mr. Maddison an' me'll take you in on our scheme and pay you a share on anything we make out of it. *Anything*, mind you—you'll remember that later on! . . . If you go sneakin' to the

Resident, you won't do yourself no good. 'E may out me, but 'e'll out you too. 'E'll tell the missionary. You know wot these missionaries are. . . .

THE QUEEN: . . . Where is Henri now ?

'ENSHAW (*as impatiently as he dares*): Oh, never mind about 'im. Wot we got to think about——

THE QUEEN: Where is Henri now ?

'ENSHAW: I tell you I brought 'im with me. 'E's down at the store. We come over in the schooner from Tonga, yesterday.

THE QUEEN: I like to see ! You go get him !

'ENSHAW (*arguing*): But wot's the sense in that ? Only goin' to pile up trouble.

THE QUEEN (*fiercely*): I tell you I like to see him. . . . You want some land, don't you ? I got to turn off my people to let you have it. All right. I don't mind. You bring my husband, you can have the land. But you bring him now.

'ENSHAW (*wringing his hands*): I tell you it's no good. The British Government'll 'oof you out of the place. If you don't marry a chief from 'ere or Tonga or somewhere, your uncle'll raise 'ell. All your chiefs 'ere'll rise. You'll get kicked out.

THE QUEEN: You say he is a prince ? Cannot a queen marry a prince from Europe ?

'ENSHAW: But wot makes you think 'e's that sort of prince ? I dunno about 'is bein' a prince.

THE QUEEN: No, but he tell me the same. That time in Suva. I know. He tell me. You go. You bring him here. (*He hesitates.*) If you want you land, you better go. . . .

[*A voice in the side doorway, " May we come in ? " The rush portière is swept aside, and two people enter—LORIMER, the missionary, an elderly man, didactic and rather severe with white people, kindly in a sentimental, fatherly way with the natives; and a middle-aged, practical-looking Englishwoman, complete with camera and the paraphernalia of the tourist, MRS. HAMILTON CARTER, traveller and journalist.*

LORIMER: Oh . . . I hope we haven't disturbed you. . . . (*Advancing to THE QUEEN*) I have brought a very distinguished

writer to see you, Queen Ma'afi Litia . . . Mrs. Hamilton Carter—the Queen. . . .

THE QUEEN (*with a dignified inclination of the head*): *Vinaka na mbula*,\* Mrs. Hamilton Carter. I am very glad to see you.

[*'ENSHAW fades into the background.* MRS. HAMILTON CARTER *bows.*

LORIMER (*expansively*): Mrs. Carter is going to write a book about her experiences in the South Seas.

MRS. CARTER: Now, what is exactly the right way to address Your Majesty? I always like to get the customs of the country exactly right. When I was in the desert—Arabia, you know, and all that—I always insisted on giving the sheiks their full proper titles. Always. They loved me for it. Now, what do I call you? Not Your Majesty, of course. There's some native equivalent, isn't there?

LORIMER: Her people call her *Marama Levu*.† That means "great lady." (*With a genuine affection that robs the words of their patronage*) We call her Litia—because we baptized her, and brought her up, and taught her to be a good girl.

[*THE QUEEN'S change of countenance is lost upon their self-complacency.*

MRS. CARTER: Oh, but I shall call her—what was it? . . . *Marama* something—of course!

LORIMER: *Marama Levu.*

MRS. CARTER: *Marama Levu.* . . . How do you do, *Marama Levu*? No, that's not right, because I haven't got the native greeting—I must get that right for my book, you know.

LORIMER: You should say what she said to you. *Vinaka na mbula.* That means "Good health to you."

MRS. CARTER (*making a tolerable shot at the pronunciation*): *Vinaka na mbula*—there!

THE QUEEN: Please, will you sit down?

MRS. CARTER: Thank you, but would you mind if I took a photograph? (*Unslinging her camera.*)

\* Veenukker narm-booler.

† Marahmer Layvoo.

THE QUEEN (*graciously*): If you like, certainly.

LORIMER (*observing 'ENSHAW for the first time*): Oh—and who's this?

'ENSHAW (*sullen and defiant*): 'Enshaw's my name.

LORIMER (*puzzled*): Enshaw?

'ENSHAW (*bridling*): No, not Enshaw, 'Enshaw!

LORIMER: Oh, Henshaw. I see. . . . You're visiting the Queen?

'ENSHAW: Well, so are you. It's no business of yours.

LORIMER (*in his character of statesman-priest*): Perhaps you realize that I am one of Her Majesty's principal advisers. Your business, whatever it may be, will come to me for consideration. Don't you think, therefore—

THE QUEEN (*with just a trace of anxiety in her voice—she is a little afraid of the missionary*): You can go, Misiter Henshaw. You go and do what I say. Now! Quick!

'ENSHAW: 'Adn't I better wait for Maddison?

THE QUEEN (*imperious*): You damn quick—hurry up!

'ENSHAW (*taken aback*): Oh, certainly—

MRS. CARTER (*anxiously*): Don't move, *Marama*—Your Majesty. A wonderful pose. Just a second. (*The click of the camera.*) Thanks so much.

[ 'ENSHAW takes advantage of the diversion to make himself scarce, going out through the main door.

THE QUEEN (*politely, to MRS. CARTER*): This the first time you come to South Sea Island?

MRS. CARTER: Oh no, Your Majesty—oh there, I've got it wrong again—*Marama Levu*. I'm an old campaigner. (*Winding up her films, and recording the title of the picture with the autographic pencil. She speaks aloud as she does so.*) Moturea, June 7th, the *Marama Levu* on her throne—I must have it right for the book, you see. . . . (*Resuming the conversation*) No. I've been all through the islands. I think the South Sea peoples are very interesting. Most interesting! An old heliolithic culture, you know! Quite unlike anyone else—except, of course, the people of Madagascar. You haven't been to Madagascar, *Marama Levu*?



THE QUEEN : No. I never gone anywhere. Only Fiji to school.

MRS. CARTER : Ah, you've got the joys of travel before you. I expect you'll think England and Europe just as strange and wonderful as we Europeans think your beautiful Pacific Islands.

LORIMER (*not to be left out of it*) : The—hum—ha—races of Polynesia are among the most favoured of God's peoples. They are not always mindful of their blessings, but on the whole——

MRS. CARTER : Should you say that the white influence was always a blessing, Mr. Lorimer ?

LORIMER : I was not speaking of the white influence so much as the influence of the hum—ha—Church. In the early days the—ah—white influence was by no means salutary.

MRS. CARTER : I once spent several months in New Caledonia. It hardly struck me that the French penal settlement there was an unmixed blessing to the natives.

LORIMER (*loftily*) : But, Mrs. Hamilton Carter, that is not the same thing at all ! That is Melanesia. We are in Polynesia. The Wesleyan Church has practically *no* foothold in Melanesia. That is the province of the Church of England !

MRS. CARTER : I wasn't criticizing Church administration, but the terrible influence of the convicts upon the natives. So many of them on release take up with native women, and drag the poor things down to their own degraded level, and, of course, the children are half-castes.

THE QUEEN : Half-castes—ugh—no good. I don't like half-castes.

MRS. CARTER : No. They're nobody's children.

LORIMER (*reproachfully*) : But they *are* children—and they have a Father in Heaven !

MRS. CARTER : You're bound to say that, of course, Mr. Lorimer. But if you can judge by their habits, poor creatures, you'd think them more intimately connected with another place. Dear me ! They're very naughty sometimes. So promiscuous and er—in fact, really hardly decent sometimes ! And sometimes quite, quite handsome and attractive. I remember one boy in particular. The half-caste son



of a very well connected man. A murderer, I think he was, or something,—perhaps it was vitriol throwing. French criminals are so very—criminal—aren't they? But his son did terrible things with women. He had at least three wives—and I think he married another not long ago. (*The others have long ago lost all but the politest semblance of interest. She realizes her error and switches off the conversation.*) Dear me—what were we talking about? (*To THE QUEEN, as one talks down to a child*) And do you take an interest in gardening?

THE QUEEN (*sulky*): No, I don't like.

MRS. CARTER: You ought to make yourself. Try English roses. They grow beautifully in the tropics. You must let me send you some when I get back home again. Oh yes, and hydrangeas, too.

[RATU BENI swaggers in through the main door, alone.]

LORIMER (*immediately becoming the showman*): Now, this fine old savage is really worth your attention. Ratu Beni Matanitombua, Mrs. Hamilton Carter. (*Explaining to BENI*) Lady come from Peritania.

RATU BENI: Oh, yes. (*Smiling and bowing*) 'Ow do you do—Very well, thank you?

LORIMER: You must take a photograph of him.

MRS. CARTER: I will, I will.

[*She prepares for the camera.*]

LORIMER (*explaining*): By and by she put you in a book. (*To MRS. CARTER*) Ratu Beni hasn't got much to thank the whites for, let me tell you. The blackbirders kidnapped him when he was a lad of fourteen, and sold him as a labourer on the plantations in Fiji. A King's son, mind you. *Sandina*\*—eh, Beni?

RATU BENI: *Sandina*, Misi Lorimer—yes, quite true. But I settle for that when we catch a boat's crew come ashore for water. Kill um!

MRS. CARTER (*over the top of the camera*): Gracious! . . . Just turn your head a little this way. That's right.

[*The click of the camera. She proceeds to wind up the spool.*]

\* Sarndeener.

LORIMER: There's quite a lot of the old Adam in our friend Ratu Beni. He's a reformed character now. We've made a Christian of him. He takes the plate round on Sundays, don't you, Beni? But there was a time when he preferred *long-pig* to *bullomikau*.\* *Long-pig* is human flesh you know, and *bullomikau* is butcher's meat.

MRS. CARTER: What an interesting man! (*To BENI*) Now, you must tell me exactly how you did it. The cannibal feasts, I mean.

RATU BENI: All ri'. I show you. Suppoti some man he make bad for you.

MRS. CARTER: Well—what for example?

THE QUEEN: If he make you a dirty trick——

RATU BENI: Perhaps insult you.

THE QUEEN: Perhaps he steal you sister.

LORIMER: Anything of that sort.

MRS. CARTER: I see. Go on.

RATU BENI: This man he going to be kill—eh? The Chief he call he brother or somebody: he say you bring this feller. I go kill. I go eat um. Then he brother or someone he black he face like for *meke-meke* war dance. He dress up. He go get the man. He say Chief like you too much. You come along see the Chief, and he take the man go along talk to him bery nice. Then he come Chief. Chief he say I like you too much. You like me give you house. You like me give you land. Mean to say dig a big oven kill and cook him. (*Laughing heartily*) That the house and land. Good joke, eh? Man he bery pright. He say, "I got house. I got land. I no want. I like go home my pamily." Chief he laugh. He say, "All ri'. I send you home. Bery good you go home." Then he put he hand on he head—lika this (*acting it*) signal to he brother or someone, like that (*a hideous grimace*). He come up behind lika this (*acting it*). Bonk! Man he dead. Gone home—eh? Everybody shout and laugh. Drag away. *Kai kai*. Very good! All sing.

(*Chanting softly*):

*Yari au malua,  
Yari au malua,  
Oio na soro ni nomu vanua*

\* Bullomeecow.

*Yi mundu koia  
A woi woi woi.  
Ya-Ha-Ha-Ha-Ha.*

*[A terrific yell.]*

MRS. CARTER: It's too marvellous ! Will you tell me again to-morrow so that I can write it all down ? And I wish you'd let me take a photograph. Would you put on the dress ?

RATU BENI: All ri'. You come to-night. I bring my war club. I show.

*[Darkness begins to fall rapidly.]*

MRS. CARTER: But I can't photograph you at night. Oh, I know. I'll make a sketch. May I ? That would be marvellous. Mr. Lorimer, will you come and get my sketching-block with me ?

LORIMER: Surely.

MRS. CARTER: Ask him to put on the dress.

LORIMER (*as they go*): He will. He'll be delighted to dress up. They're just like children, you know. . . .

RATU BENI: I think he good man that woman ! Eh—you think ?

THE QUEEN (*bursting out*): I hate her ! I hate them—all the whites ! They come and look at us all a same pig ! What we get from the white man ? All they want is to take away our land. Who ask the white man to come and make us copy him ? They spoil this place for me. If they want steal my power, all right. Pay me and let me go. Better I stop Australia, New Zealand, England. There I can be all a same as white man ! Here, my own country, white man always the chief, make me do what he say.

RATU BENI (*soothing her*): You talka poolish !

THE QUEEN: Foolish ? You listen. I tell you something. That time I stop at school in Suva—

*[She pauses and changes her mind.]*

RATU BENI (*stern*): Well, what you do ?

THE QUEEN: Never mind to you. Listen. You go. Put you dress for *meke-meke*. I like you dance for me.

RATU BENI (*good-natured*): *Savinaka ! All ri'. Au laki yani vakarau noongu sulu meke-meke.*

[*He turns and goes out. THE QUEEN remains sitting in solitary state. Suddenly she calls.*

THE QUEEN: *Hé Koiko ! (THE GIRL ATTENDANT crawls in.) Vakarau na theena !*

[*THE GIRL kindles a lamp. While she is doing so THE QUEEN suddenly leaves her throne and goes within. When the lamp is kindled THE ATTENDANT follows. Silence. The empty stage. Sound of voices approaching. 'ENSHAW enters with another man—a dark-skinned handsome fellow—HENRI.*

HENRI: *I raza not do this, you know !*

'ENSHAW (*fiercely*): *Gawd—don't you start arguin' ! I've 'ad enough of that. Do you think I've bin payin' you good money to 'ave you backin' out when the time comes ?*

HENRI: *But listen ! I cannot stay here. That was not the bargain ! I agree to come wiz you—to be en arrière. That was different !*

'ENSHAW: *Now, look here. There's good money in this. I'm not goin' to 'ave it go west for your damned squeamishness. You've got to play up to the girl. She's all right, isn't she ? You can make a run for it when we're settled down and workin'. You got to see it through. Damn it, isn't a gold mine worth a bit of—*

HENRI (*flashing out*): *Oui. Mais tout de même. I don't want trouble. C'est difficile pour moi. I don't want a—*

'ENSHAW (*warningly*): *S'sh !*

[*MRS. CARTER has entered unceremoniously.*

MRS. CARTER: *Oh, did I leave my camera ? . . . Yes, here it is. (Observing the two men) Now, that's very interesting. (To 'ENSHAW) You're a beachcomber, aren't you ?*

'ENSHAW: *No, I am not. Never 'eard of such a thing—I'm an island produce merchant.*

MRS. CARTER: *Oh, well, I always like to make friends with the locals. And your friend here ? (To HENRI) But I've seen you before.*

HENRI: *Jamais !*



MRS. CARTER: Oh, yes, I have. I never forget faces. You used to be in Noumea—the French penal settlement. I remember perfectly.

HENRI (*shouting*): I tell you nevaire !

MRS. CARTER: Well, dear me, you mustn't shout ! Wasn't your father the man they called the Prince ?

HENRI: Well—suppose he was ?

MRS. CARTER: Well—that's just what I say.

[THE QUEEN enters. *She is in island negligée.* MRS. CARTER turns to her at once.

Oh, now, isn't this too interesting ! That interesting half-caste I told you about. The son of the French murderer—vitriol creature—you remember. (*Triumphantly*) Here he is ! Well, the world's a small place !

THE QUEEN (*disregarding*): You want to see me ?

MRS. CARTER (*abashed*): Oh, no. I hope I'm not intruding. I came back for my camera. Yes.

[*Backing towards the door. She disappears discomfited.*

THE QUEEN: You can go, Misiter Henshaw.

'ENSHAW: Well—I was going to suggest——

THE QUEEN: You can go, please.

'ENSHAW: That's what I was goin' to suggest. (*To HENRI*) I'll 'ang about outside.

[HENRI nods. 'ENSHAW departs.

HENRI: Ma'afi, you don't pay attention to what that woman says.

THE QUEEN: So . . . you come back to me—my husband.

HENRI (*awkwardly*): *Je suis très heureux de vous revoir, Madame !*

THE QUEEN: Still in French. Well—as you please. What have you to say to me ?

HENRI (*halting*): Only to say . . . I am so sorree . . . we have been—separate . . .

THE QUEEN: Of course—it could not be help.

HENRI: Naturally, Madame.

THE QUEEN: Is that how you call your wife ?



HENRI: *Madame—je te prie.* . . . Please do not make this all so difficult. It is not . . . *vair* easy to explain. Perhaps if I tell you—

THE QUEEN: Explain! What is to explain now we are together?

HENRI (*growing easier*): No. Of course. There is nothing. I sought per'aps you may be sinking that per'aps I ought to write—or send some message. But you see—

THE QUEEN: But you come to me now—so I suppose . . . all this separation . . . is finish?

HENRI: *Sans doute. Sans doute!*

THE QUEEN: Are you not very please to find that your wife is a Queen?

HENRI: Very proud, Madame,

THE QUEEN: . . . And you are a Prince—Big Chief!

HENRI: *Par descente seulement.* I have no position. My father had no position. Napoleon make my ancestor a Prince of the Empire.

THE QUEEN: And his descendant is also a Prince?

HENRI: I suppose.

THE QUEEN: And therefore the fit husband for a Queen. . . . But he may be married.

HENRI: To you.

THE QUEEN: He may be married to a half-caste—or a white woman. Perhaps two or three. . . . And then perhaps the Queen can punish!

HENRI (*in a desperate attempt to change her mood*): Ma'afi—you are lovely . . . adorable! *Tu es ravissante!* Always I think of you. It is not my wish or my fault that we never see one another for so long. . . .

THE QUEEN: Ah! But are you not forget the other women?

HENRI: . . . You do not wish me here. I go away.

THE QUEEN: No, wait. Wait a little while.

HENRI: *Alors embrasse-moi donc.* Kiss me, Ma'afi.

THE QUEEN (*gently extricating herself from his arms*): A little patience. Since we wait two years we can wait five minutes. We must talk to my uncle.

HENRI (*alarmed*): Uncle? *Qu'est ce que c'est que ça?*

THE QUEEN: In a moment. He put on his dress. He comes to dance for our wedding.

HENRI (*relieved*): Oh—our wedding—yes.

THE QUEEN: Tell me, why you marry the Queen?

HENRI (*muttering*): *C'était l'amour*. I don't know.

THE QUEEN: *L'amour*. The love. . . . Love of me?

HENRI: *Naturellement*—

THE QUEEN: —Or love of money?

HENRI (*cold fear gripping at him*): What you mean?

THE QUEEN (*hissing the words*): How much Henshaw give you?

HENRI (*muttering*): *Ne comprend pas*. Do you wish to insult me? I shall go (*trying to work himself into a passion*). No. I refuse to stay.

[*He turns to go out—but recoils. RATU BENI, with blackened face and native dress, stands in the doorway. HENRI chokes back a little scream of dismay. BENI smiles and advances jovially. He is carrying his war club.*

RATU BENI (*with smiling cordiality*): *Vinaka na mbula*. Very well, thank you? You no want go away. You stay a little. See the dance.

THE QUEEN: Come and sit here with me—Prince.

RATU BENI: You Prince—eh? *Vinaka na mbula*, Prince.

[HENRI looks from one to the other. A little choke of terror escapes from his throat.

THE QUEEN: You are a Prince, yes?

HENRI (*muttering*): . . . Yes.

THE QUEEN: Not a half-caste? (*A dreadful silence.*) Not a liar? Not the man who make a fool of the Queen? A half-caste—from Noumea? The son of a convict? . . . But of course that is half white and so it is too good for Moturea girl. Too good for the Queen? Eh? You tell me, please—half-caste!

HENRI (*crumpling up*): Well. Is not my fault. Not my fault my father send to Noumea. I can't help to be a half-caste.

THE QUEEN: Not your fault you tell lie to Moturea girl? Make the Queen a fool? Not your fault you all a same white man? Empty heart. Lying tongue. You do it for money—eh? (HENRI *looks from one to the other, licking his lips and trying to find courage*. THE QUEEN *resumes*): You like money, eh? . . . You like me give you house? Give you land?

[HENRI *looks up with dawning hope*. RATU BENI, *understanding better, drops behind him with club in readiness*.

HENRI: Ma'afi. . . . *Je suis très mécontent de t'avoir fâché*. I very sorry. I don't want you give me anything. . . . I go.

THE QUEEN (*frozenly*): You like better go home? All right. (*Forcing a laugh*) Very good. You go home!

[*He turns in the doorway*. BENI, *raising his club, turns his eye on* THE QUEEN. *Slowly her hand comes up to her head in the signal. Just as HENRI reaches the doorway it is completed. BENI leaps forward and the club falls. A terrible shriek from HENRI, followed by the old-time war-yell from BENI. Then a peal of maniac laughter. The QUEEN looks on immobile. The old half-forgotten Cannibal club-dance begins.*

'ENSHAW (*rushing in*): 'Oo was that called out? 'Ere, Christ! What yer doin'? . . . What yer doin'?

RATU BENI (*chanting as he dances*): *Yari au malua—yari au malua. Oio na soro ni nomu vanua. Yi mundu koia . . . Ya-Ha-Ha-Ha-Ha . . .*

'ENSHAW (*screaming through the din*): Stop it, you fool. . . . You bloody mad fool. . . .

[*Footsteps at the side door.*

MRS. CARTER (*entering with LORIMER*): Well—are we ready for the dance?

THE QUEEN: . . . The dance is finish!

[*She turns on her heel and walks regally into her private apartment.*

Harold Brighthouse

LONESOME-LIKE

*A Play*

6904

## CHARACTERS

SARAH ORMEROD, an old woman

EMMA BRIERLEY, a young woman

THE REV. FRANK ALLEYNE, a curate

SAM HORROCKS, a young man

*This play was produced for the first time on any stage at THE ROYALTY THEATRE, GLASGOW, by the GLASGOW REPERTORY COMPANY, under the direction of MR. ALFRED WAREING, on Monday, February 6th, 1911, with the following cast:*

<i>Sarah Ormerod</i>	-	-	-	-	GWYNNETH GALTON
<i>Emma Brierley</i>	-	-	-	-	MARGARET NYBLOC
<i>The Rev. Frank Alleyne</i>	-	-	-	-	WALTER ROY
<i>Sam Horrocks</i>	-	-	-	-	EDMOND BREON

*Produced by MR. HAROLD CHAPIN*

*Subsequently performed by MISS HORNIMAN'S COMPANY, and by the LIVERPOOL REPERTORY THEATRE.*

*It has been broadcast on many occasions, and also televised.*

In his volume of memoirs, *Are We All Met?* Mr. Whitford Kane, who was the first Will Mossop in *Hobson's Choice*, tells how Mr. Iden Payne cast him in *Lonesome-Like* in America. For the life of him, Mr. Kane could not see himself as Sam Horrocks, and almost quarrelled with Payne before, reluctantly, he took the part. He made a great success in it and, for years, whenever Kane required a stand-by between engagements in long plays, he used *Lonesome-Like*. In England, the classic Sam was Mr. Herbert Lomas.

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*The scene represents the interior of a cottage in a Lancashire village. Through the window at the back the grey row of cottages opposite is just visible. The outside door is next to the window. Door left. As regards the furniture the room is very bare. The suggestion is not of an empty room, but a stripped room. For example, there are several square patches where the distemper of the walls is of a darker shade than the rest, indicating the places once occupied by pictures. There is an uncovered deal table and two chairs by it near the fireplace right. Attached to the left wall is a dresser and a plate rack above it containing a few pots. The dresser has also one or two utensils upon it. A blackened kettle rests on the top of the cooking range, but the room contains only the barest necessities. The floor is uncarpeted. There are no window curtains, but a yard of cheap muslin is fastened across the window, not coming, however, high enough to prevent a passer-by from looking in should he wish to do so. On the floor, near the fire, is a battered black tin trunk, the lid of which is raised. On a peg behind the door left is a black silk skirt and bodice and an old-fashioned beaded bonnet. The time is afternoon. As the curtain rises the room is empty. Immediately, however, the door left opens and SARAH ORMEROD, an old woman, enters carrying clumsily in her arms a couple of pink flannelette nightdresses, folded neatly. Her black stuff dress is well worn, and her wedding-ring is her only ornament. She wears elastic-sided boots, and her rather short skirt shows a pair of grey worsted stockings. A small plaid shawl covers her shoulders. SARAH crosses and puts the nightdresses on the table, surveying the trunk ruefully. There is a knock at the outside door and she looks up.*

SARAH: Who's theer?

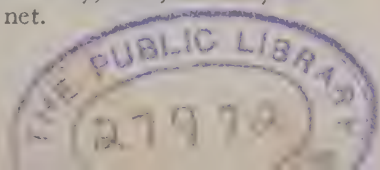
EMMA (*without*): It's me, Mrs. Ormerod, Emma Brierley.

SARAH: Eh, coom in, Emma, lass.

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The play is published by Messrs. Gowans and Gray, Ltd., and may be obtained from Messrs. Samuel French at 1s. net.



[Enter EMMA BRIERLEY. *She is a young weaver, and, having just left her work, she wears a dark skirt, a blouse of some indeterminate blue-grey shade made of cotton, and a large shawl over her head and shoulders in place of a jacket and hat. A coloured cotton apron covers her skirt below the waist, and the short skirt displays stout stockings similar to SARAH's. She wears clogs, and the clothes—except the shawl—are covered with ends of cotton and cotton-wool fluff. Even her hair has not escaped. A pair of scissors hangs by a cord from her waist.*

SARAH: Tha's kindly welcoom. It's good o' thee to think o' commin' to see an ould woman like me.

EMMA (*by door*): Nought o' th' sort, Mrs. Ormerod. Th' mill's just loosed and A thowt A'd step in as A were passin' and see 'ow tha was feeling like.

SARAH (*crossing to box*): Oh, nicely, nicely, thankee. It's only my 'ands as is gone paralytic, tha knaws, an' a weaver's no manner o' good to nobody without th' use o' 'er 'ands. A'm all reeght in mase'l'. That's worst of it.

EMMA: Well, while A'm 'ere, Mrs. Ormerod, is theer nought as A can do for thee?

SARAH: A dunno as theer is, thankee, Emma.

EMMA (*taking her shawl off, looking round and hanging it on a peg in the door*): Well, A knaws better. What wert doin' when A coom in? Packin' yon box?

SARAH: Aye. Tha sees theer's a two three things as A canna bear thowt o' parting from. A don't reeghtly knaw if they'll let me tak' 'em into workus wi' me, but A canna have 'em sold wi' rest of stuff.

EMMA (*crosses below SARAH to box, going on her knees*): Let me help yo.

SARAH: Tha's a good lass, Emma. A'd tak' it kindly of thee.

EMMA: They'd do wi' packin' a bit closer. A dunno as they'd carry safe that road.

SARAH: A knaw. It's my 'ands, tha sees, as mak's it difficult for me.

[Sits on chair L. C.]

EMMA: Aye. A'll soon settle 'em a bit tighter.

*[Lifts all out. Burying her arms in the box and rearranging its contents.]*

SARAH: But what's 'appened to thy looms, lass? They'll not weave by 'emselves while thee's 'ere, tha knows.

EMMA (*looking round*): Eh, looms is all reeght. Factory's stopped. It's Saturday afternoon.

SARAH: So 'tis. A'd clean forgot. A do forget time o' th' week sittin' 'ere day arter day wi' nought to do.

EMMA: So that's all reeght. Tha's no need to worry about me. Tha's got trouble enough of thy own.

*[Resuming at the box.]*

SARAH: Aye, th'art reeght theer, lass. Theer's none on us likes to think o' going to workus when we're ould.

EMMA: 'Appen it'll be all reeght after all. Parson's coomin' to see thee.

SARAH: Aye, A know 'e is. A dunno, but A'm in 'opes 'e'll do summat for me. Tha can't never tell what them folks can do.

EMMA (*kneeling up*): Tha keep thy pecker oop, Mrs. Ormerod. That's what my moother says to me when A tould 'er A were coomin' in to thee. Keep 'er pecker oop, she says. It's not as if she'd been lazy or a wastrel, she says; Sal Ormerod's bin a 'ard worker in 'er day, she says. It's not as if it were thy fault. Tha can't 'elp tha 'ands going paralytic.

*[She continues rummaging in the trunk while speaking.]*

SARAH: Naw. It's not my fault. God knows A'm game enough for work, ould as A am. A allays knawed as A'd 'ave to work for my living all th' days o' my life. A never was a savin' sort.

EMMA: Theer's nowt against thee for that. Theer's some as can be careful o' their brass an' some as can't. It's not a virtue, it's a gift. That's what my moother allays says.

*[Resumes packing.]*

SARAH: She's reeght an' all. We never 'ad the gift o' savin', my man and me. An' when Tom Ormerod took an' died, the club money as A drew all went on 'is funeral an' 'is gravestone. A warn't goin' to 'ave it said as 'e warn't buried proper.

EMMA: It were a beautiful funeral, Mrs. Ormerod.

SARAH: Aye.

EMMA: A will say that, beautiful it were. A never seen a better, an' A goes to all as A can. (*Rises.*) A dotes on buryin's. Are these the next?

[*Crosses C. before table for nightdresses. Takes the nightdresses, and resumes packing.*]

SARAH: Aye.

[*EMMA puts them in and rests on her knees listening to SARAH's next speech.*]

SARAH (*pause*): A've been a 'ouseproud woman all my life, Emma, an A've took pride in 'aving my bits 'o sticks as good as another's. Even th' manager's missus oop to factory 'ouse theer, she never 'ad a better show o' furniture nor me, though A says it as shouldn't. An' it tak's brass to keep a decent 'ouse over your yead. An' we allays 'ad our full week's 'ollydayin' at Blackpool reglar at Wakes time. Us didn't 'ave no childer o' our own to spend it on, an' us spent it on ourselves. A allays 'ad a plenty o' good food in th' 'ouse an' never stinted nobody, an' Tom 'e liked 'is beer an' 'is baccy. 'E were a pigeon-fancier too in 'is day, were my Tom, an' pigeon-fancying runs away wi' a mint o' money. No. Soom'ow theer never was no brass to put in th' bank. We was allays spent oop coom wages neeght.

EMMA: A knaw, Mrs. Ormerod. May be A'm young, but A knaw 'ow 'tis. We works cruel 'ard in th' mill, an', when us plays, us plays as 'ard too (*pause*), an' small blame to us either. It's our *own* we're spendin'.

SARAH: Aye. It's a 'ard life, the factory 'and's. A can mind me many an' many's the time when th' warnin' bell went on th' factory lodge at ha'f-past five of a winter's mornin' as A've craved for another ha'f-hour in my bed, but Tom 'e got me oop an' we was never after six passin'



through factory gates all th' years we were wed. There's not many as can say they were never late. "Work or Clem," that were what Tom allays tould me th' ould bell were sayin'. An' 'e were reeght, Emma, "Work or Clem" is God's truth. (EMMA's *head in box*.) An' now th' time's coom when A can't work no more. But Parson's a good man, 'e'll mak' it all reeght. (EMMA's *head appears*.) Eh, it were good o' thee to coom in, lass. A bit o' coompany do mak' a world o' difference. A'm twice as cheerful as A were.

EMMA: A'm glad to 'ear tha say so, Mrs. Ormerod. (*Rises from the box*.) Is theer owt else?

SARAH: A were thinking A'd like to tak' my black silk as A've worn o' Sundays this many a year, but A canna think it's reeght thing for workus.

EMMA: Oh, thee tak' it, Mrs. Ormerod.

SARAH: A'd dearly love to. Tha sees A'm noan in debt, nobbut what chairs an' table 'ull pay for, and A doan't like thowt o' leaving owt as A'm greatly fond of.

EMMA: Yo doan't, Mrs. Ormerod. Thee tak' it. Wheer is it? A'll put un in. Theer's lots o' room on top. A'll see un's noan crushed.

SARAH: It's hanging theer behind door. (EMMA *crosses back to door, gets clothes*.) A got un out to show Parson. A thowt A'd ask un if it were proper to tak' it if A've to go. My best bonnet's with it, an' all.

[EMMA *goes below table, takes the frock and bonnet, folds it on the table and packs it*.

EMMA: A'll put un in.

SARAH: A'm being a lot o' trouble to thee, lass.

EMMA: That's nowt, neighbours mun be neighbourly.

[*Gets bonnet from table and packs it*.

SARAH (*pause. Looking round*): Place doan't look much, an' that's a fact. Th' furniture's bin goin' bit by bit, and theer ain't much left to part wi' now.

EMMA: Never mind, it 'ull be all reeght now Parson's takken thee oop.

SARAH: A'm hopin' so. A *am* hopin' so. A never could abide th' thowt o' th' workus—me as 'as bin an 'ard-workin' woman. A couldn't fancy sleepin' in a strange bed wi' strange folk round me, an' when th' Matron said "Do that" A'd 'ave to do it, an' when she said "Go theer" A'd 'ave to a' gone wheer she tould me—me as 'as allays 'eld my yead 'igh an' gone the way A pleased masel'. Eh, it's a terrible thowt, the workus.

EMMA (*rising*): Now tha's sure that's all?

SARAH (*pause. Considers*): Eh, if A havna forgot my neeght-caps. (*Rises, moves C. and stops.*) A suppose they'll let me wear un in yonder. A doan't reeghtly think as A'd get my rest proper wi'out my neeghtcaps.

EMMA: Oh, they'll let thee wear un all reeght.

SARAH (*as she goes*): A'll go an' get un. (*Exit R., returning presently with the white nightcaps.*) That's all now.

[*Giving them to EMMA, who meets her C.*]

EMMA (*putting them in*): Yo never 'ad no childer, did yo, Mrs. Ormerod?

SARAH: No, Emma, no—may be that's as broad as 's long. (*Sits above fire.*) Yo never know 'ow they go. Soom on 'em turn again yo when they're growed or they get wed themselves an' forget all as yo've done for 'em, like a many A could name, and they're allays a worrit to yo when they're young.

EMMA: A'm gettin' wed masel' soon, Mrs. Ormerod.

SARAH: Are yo, now, Emma? Well, tha art not one o' them graceless good-for-nowts. Tha'll never forget thy moother, A know, nor what she's done for thee. Who's tha keepin' coompany with?

EMMA: It's Joe Hindle as goes wi' me, Mrs. Ormerod.

SARAH: 'Indle, 'Indle? What, not son to Robert 'Indle, 'im as used to be overlooker in th' factory till 'e went to foreign parts to learn them Roossians 'ow to weave?

EMMA: Aye, that's 'im.

SARAH: Well, A dunno ought about th' lad. 'Is faither were a fine man. A minds 'im well. But A'll tell thee this,

Emma, an' A'll tell it thee to thy faice, 'e 's doin' well for 'isself is young Joe 'Indle.

EMMA: Thankee, Mrs. Ormerod.

SARAH: Gettin' wed ! Think o' that. What, it seems as t'were only t'other day as tha was running about in short frocks, an' now tha's growed up and gettin' thasel' wed ! Time do run on. Sithee, Emma, tha's a good lass. A've gotten an ould tea-pot in yonder (*indicating her bedroom*) as my moother give me when A was wed. A weren't for packing it in box because o' risk o' breaking it. A were going to carry it in my 'and. A'd a mind to keep it till A died, but A reckon A'll 'ave no use for it in workus.

EMMA: Tha's not gone theer yet.

SARAH: Never mind that. (*Slowly rises.*) A'm going to give it thee, lass, for a weddin'-gift. Tha'll tak' care of it, A knaw, and when thy eye catches it, 'appen tha'll spare me a thowt.

EMMA: Oh no, Mrs. Ormerod, A couldn't think o' takkin' it.

SARAH: Art too proud to tak' a gift from me ?

EMMA: No. Tha knaws A'm not.

SARAH: Then hold thy hush. A'll be back in a minute. Happen A'd best tidy masel' up too against Parson cooms.

EMMA: Can A help thee, Mrs. Ormerod ?

SARAH: No, lass, no. A can do a bit for masel'. My 'ands isn't that bad. A canna weave wi' 'em, but A can do all as A need to.

EMMA: Well, A'll do box up.

[*Crosses to table R. and gets cord.*]

SARAH: Aye.

EMMA: All reeght.

[*Exit SARAH. A man's face appears outside at the window. He surveys the room, and then the face vanishes as he knocks at the door.*]

Who's theer ?

SAM (*without*): It's me, Sam Horrocks. (EMMA *crosses L. and opens door.*) May A coom in?

EMMA: What dost want?

SAM (*on the doorstep*): A want a word wi' thee, Emma Brierley. A followed thee oop from factory and A've bin waitin' out theer till A'm tired o' waitin'.

EMMA: Well, tha'd better coom in. A 'aven't time to talk wi' thee at door.

[EMMA *lets him in, closes door, and, leaving him standing in the middle of the room, resumes work on her knees at the box.* SAM HORROCKS *is a hulking young man of a rather vacant expression. He is dressed in mechanic's blue dungarees. His face is oily and his clothes stained. He wears boots, not clogs. He mechanically takes a ball of oily black cotton-waste from his right pocket when in conversational difficulties and wipes his hands upon it. He has a red muffler round his neck without collar, and his shock of fair hair is surmounted by a greasy black cap, which covers perhaps one tenth of it.*

SAM (*after watching EMMA's back for a moment*): Wheer's Mrs. Ormerod?

EMMA (*without looking up*): What's that to do wi' thee?

SAM (*apologetically*): A were only askin'. Tha needn't be short wi' a chap.

EMMA: She's in scullery washin' 'er if tha wants to know.

SAM: Oh!

EMMA (*looking at him over her shoulder after a slight pause*): Doan't tha tak' thy cap off in 'ouse, Sam Horrocks?

SAM: Naw.

EMMA: Well, tha can tak' it off in this 'ouse or get t' other side o' door.

SAM (*takes off his cap and stuffs it in his left pocket after trying his right and finding the ball of waste in it*): Yes, Emma.

[EMMA *resumes work with her back towards him and waits for him to speak. But he is not ready yet.*

EMMA: Well, what dost want?

SAM: Nought. . . . Eh, but tha art a gradely wench.

EMMA: What's that to do wi' thee ?

SAM: Nought.

EMMA: Then just tha mind thy own business, an' doan't pass compliments behind folks' backs.

SAM: A didn't mean no 'arm.

EMMA: Well ?

SAM: It's a fine day, isn't it ? For th' time o' th' year ?

EMMA: Aye.

SAM: A very fine day.

EMMA: Aye.

SAM (*desperately*): It's a damned fine day.

EMMA: Aye.

SAM (*after a moment*): Dost know my 'ouse, Emma ?

EMMA: Aye.

SAM: Wert ever in it ?

EMMA: Not sin' tha mooother died.

SAM: Naw. A suppose not. Not sin' ma mooother died. She were a fine woman, ma mooother, for all she were bed-ridden.

EMMA: She were better than 'er son, though that's not saying much neither.

SAM: Naw, but tha does mind ma 'ouse, Emma, as it were when she were alive ?

EMMA: Aye.

SAM: A've done a bit at it sin' them days. Got a new quilt on bed from Co-op. Red un it is wi' blue stripes down 'er.

EMMA: Aye.

SAM: Well, Emma ?

EMMA (*over her shoulder*): Well, what ? What's thy 'ouse an' thy quilt to do wi' me ?

SAM: Oh nought. . . . Tha doesn't 'elp a feller much, neither.



EMMA (*rising and facing him. SAM is behind corner table and backs a little before her*): What's tha gettin' at, Sam Horrocks? Tha's got a tongue in thy faice, hasn't tha?

SAM: A suppose so. A doan't use it much though.

EMMA: No. Tha's not much better than a tongue-tied idiot, Sam Horrocks, allays mooning about in th' engine-house in day-time an' sulkin' at 'ome neeght-time.

SAM: Aye, A'm lonely sin' ma mooother died. She did 'ave a way wi' 'er, ma mooother. Th' 'ould plaice 'as not bin t' same to me sin' she went. Day-time, tha knaws, A'm all reeght. Tha sees, them engines, them an' me's pals. They talks to me an' A understands their ways. A doan't some'ow seem to understand the ways o' folks like as A does th' ways o' them engines.

EMMA: Tha doesn't try. T'other lads goes rattin' or dog-feeghtin' on a Sunday or to a football match of a Saturday afternoon. Tha stays moonin' about th' 'ouse. Tha's not likely to understand folks. Tha's not sociable.

SAM: Naw. That's reeght enough. A nobbut get laughed at when A tries to be sociable an' stand my corner down at th' pub wi' th' rest o' th' lads. It's no use ma tryin' to soop ale, A can't carry th' drink like t'others. A knaws A've ways o' ma own.

EMMA: Tha has that.

SAM: A'm terrible lonesome, Emma. That theer 'ouse o' mine, it do want a wench about th' plaice. Th' engines is all reeght for days, but th' neeghts is that lonesome-like tha wouldn't believe.

EMMA: Tha's only thasel' to blame. It's nought to do wi' me, choosehow.

SAM: Naw? A'd . . . A'd 'oped as 'ow it might 'ave, Emma.

EMMA (*approaching threateningly*): Sam Horrocks, if tha doan't tell me proper what tha means A'll give tha such a slap in th' mouth.

SAM (*backing before her*): Tha does fluster a feller, Emma. Just like ma mooother.

EMMA: A wish A 'ad bin. A'd 'ave knocked some sense into thy silly yead.

SAM (*suddenly and clumsily kneels above chair L. of table*): Wilt tha 'ave me, Emma? A mak' good money in th' engine-house.

EMMA: Get oop, tha great fool. If tha didn't keep thasel' so close wi' tha moonin' about in th' engine-'ouse an' never speakin' a word to nobody tha'd knaw A were keepin' coompany wi' Joe Hindle.

SAM (*scrambling up*): Is that a fact, Emma?

EMMA: Of course it's a fact. Banns 'ull be oop come Sunday fortneeht. We've not 'idden it neither. It's just like the great blind idiot that tha art not to 'a' seen it long enough sin'.

SAM: A wern't aware. By gum, A 'ad so 'oped as tha'd 'ave me, Emma.

EMMA (*a little more softly*): A'm sorry if A've 'urt thee, Sam.

SAM: Aye. It were my fault. Eh, well, A think mebbe A'd best be goin'.

EMMA (*lifts box to L.*): Aye. Parson's coomin' to see Mrs. Ormerod in a minute.

SAM (*with pride*): A knaw all about that, anyhow.

EMMA: She'm in a bad way. A dunno masel' as Parson can do much for 'er.

SAM: It's 'ard lines on an ould un. Well, yo'll not want me 'ere. A'll be movin' on. (*Getting his cap out*) No offence, Emma, A 'ope. A'd a've asked thee first if A'd knawn as 'e were after thee. A've bin trying' for long enough.

EMMA: No. Theer's no offence, Sam. Tha's a good lad if tha art a fool, an' mebbe tha's not to blame for that. Good-bye.

SAM: Good-bye, Emma. An' . . . an' A 'ope 'e'll mak' thee 'appy. A'd dearly like to coom to th' weddin' an' shake 'is 'and.

[MRS. ORMEROD *heard off R.*

EMMA: A'll see tha's asked. Theer's Mrs. Ormerod stirrin'. Tha'd best be gettin'.

SAM: All reeght. Good-bye, Emma.

EMMA: Good-bye, Sam.

[Exit SAM L. C. MRS. ORMEROD comes from the inside door. She has a small blue teapot in her hand.]

SARAH: Was anybody 'ere, Emma? A thowt A yeard someun talkin', only my yearin' isn't what it used to be, an' A warn't sure.

EMMA: It were Sam Horrocks, Mrs. Ormerod.

SARAH: Yon lad of ould Sal Horrocks as died last year? 'Im as isn't reeght in 'is yead?

EMMA: Aye. 'E's bin askin' me to wed 'im.

SARAH (*incensed*): In my 'ouse? Theer's imperence for thee, an' tha promised to another lad, an' all. A'd 'ave set about 'im wi' a stick, Emma.

EMMA: 'E didn't knaw about Joe. It made me feel cruel-like to 'ave to tell 'im.

SARAH: 'E'll get ower it. Soom lass'll tak' 'im.

EMMA: A suppose so.

SARAH (*coming down, putting the tea-pot in EMMA's hands*): Well, theer's tea-pot.

EMMA (*meets SARAH R. C., examining tea-pot*): It's beautiful. Beautiful, it is, Mrs. Ormerod.

SARAH: Aye, it's a bit o' real china is that. Tha'll tak' care on't, lass, won't thee?

EMMA: A will an' all.

SARAH: Aye. A knaw it's safe wi' thee. Mebbe safer than it would be in workus. A can't think well on yon plaice. A goa cold all ower at thowt of it.

[A knock at the door.]

EMMA: That'll be Parson.

SARAH (*crosses L. Smoothing her hair*): Goa an' look through window first, an' see who 'tis.

EMMA (*puts tea-pot on table. Looking through window*): It's not th' ould Parson. It's one o' them young curate chaps.

SARAH: Well, coom away from window an' sit thee down. It won't do to seem too eager. Let un knock again if it's not th' ould Parson.

[EMMA leaves the window and goes to R. of table. The knock is repeated.]

(Raising her voice) Coom in so who tha art. Door's on latch.

[Enter the REV. FRANK ALLEYNE. He is a young curate, a Londoner and an Oxford man, by association, training, and taste, totally unfitted for a Lancashire curacy, in which he is unfortunately no exception.]

ALLEYNE: Good afternoon, Mrs. Ormerod.

SARAH: Good day to thee.

ALLEYNE: I'm sorry to say Mr. Blundell has had to go to a missionary meeting, but he asked me to come and see you in his stead.

SARAH: Tha's welcoom, lad. Sit thee down.

[EMMA comes below table L. Dusts a chair L. of table, which doesn't need it, with her apron. ALLEYNE raises a deprecatory hand. SARAH's familiarity, as it seems to him, offends him. He looks sourly at EMMA and markedly ignores her.]

ALLEYNE: Thank you; no, I won't sit, I cannot stay long.

SARAH: Just as tha likes. It's all same to me.

[EMMA stays by R. of table.]

ALLEYNE: How is it with you, Mrs. Ormerod?

SARAH: It might be worse. A've lost th' use o' my 'ands, and they're takkin' me to workus, but. A'm not dead yet, and that's summat to be thankful for.

ALLEYNE: Oh yes, yes, Mrs. Ormerod. The—er—message I am to deliver is, I fear, not quite what Mr. Blundell led you to hope for. His efforts on your behalf have—er—unfortunately failed. He finds himself obliged to give up all hope of aiding you to a livelihood. In fact—er—I understand that the arrangements made for your removal to the workhouse this afternoon must be carried out. It seems there is no alternative. I am grieved to be the bearer of bad tidings, but I am sure you will find a comfortable home awaiting you, Mrs.—er—Ormerod.



SARAH: 'Appen A shall an' 'appen A shan't. Theer's no tellin' 'ow you'll favour a thing till you've tried it.

ALLEYNE: You must resign yourself to the will of Providence. The consolations of religion are always with us. Shall I pray with you?

SARAH: A never were much at prayin' when A were well off, an' A doubt the Lord ud tak' it kind o' selfish o' me if A coom crying' to 'Im now A'm 'urt.

ALLEYNE: He will understand. Can I do nothing for you?

SARAH: A dunno as tha can, thankin' thee all same.

ALLEYNE: I am privileged with Mr. Blundell's permission to bring a little gift to you, Mrs. Ormerod. (*Feeling in his coat-tails and bringing out a Testament*) Allow me to present you with this Testament, and may it help you to bear your cross with resignation. (*He hands her the Testament. SARAH does not raise her hands, and it drops on her lap. ALLEYNE takes it again and puts it on the table.*) Ah, yes, of course . . . your poor hands . . . I understand.

SARAH: Thankee kindly. Readin' don't coom easy to me, an' my eyes aren't what they were, but A'll mak' most of it.

ALLEYNE: You will never read that in vain. And now, dear sister, I must go. I will pray for strength for you. All will be well. Good day.

SARAH: Good day to thee.

[Exit ALLEYNE.]

EMMA: Tha doesn't look so pleased wi' tha gift, Mrs. Ormerod.

SARAH: It's not square thing of th' ould Parson, Emma. 'E should a coom an' tould me 'isself. Looks like 'e were feart to do it. A never could abide them curate lads. We doan't want no grand Lunnon gentlemen down 'ere. 'E doan't understand us no more than we understand 'im. 'E means all reeght, poor lad. Sithee, Emma, A've bin a church-goin' woman all my days. A was browt oop to church, an' many's th' bit o' brass they've 'ad out o' me in my time. An' in th' end they send me a fine curate with



a tuppenny Testament. That's all th' good yo get out o' they folks.

EMMA: We'm chapel to our 'ouse, an' 'e didn't forget to let me see 'e knaw'd it, but A doan't say as it's ony different wi' chapels, neither. They get what they can outer yo, but yo mustn't look for nothin' back, when th' pinch cooms. (*Clock outside strikes three.*) Sakes alive, theer's clock goin' three. My dinner 'ull be nice an' cold.

SARAH: Eh, what's that, lass? Dost mean to tell me tha's bin clemmin' all this time?

EMMA: A coom 'ere straight from factory.

SARAH: Then tha doesn't move till tha's 'ad summat to eat.

EMMA: My dinner's ready for me at whoam, Mrs. Ormerod.

SARAH: Then just look sharp an' get it, tha silly lass. Tha's no reeght to go wi'out thy baggin'.

EMMA (*putting her shawl on*): All reeght. A'm off.

[*Picking up tea-pot.*]

SARAH: Tha's bin a world o' coomfort to me, Emma. It'll be 'arder to bear when tha's gone. Th' thowt's too much for me. Eh, lass, A'm feart o' yon great gaunt building wi' th' drear windows.

EMMA: 'Appen ma mooother 'ull coom in. Tha'll do wi' a bit o' coompany. A'll ask her to coom an' fetch thee a coop o' tea by an' bye.

[*A knock at the door.*]

SARAH: Who's theer?

SAM (*without*): It's only me, Mrs. Ormerod.

EMMA: A do declare it's that Sam Horrocks again.

SARAH: Sam Horrocks! What can th' lad be after now? (*Calling*) Hast tha wiped thy boots on scraper?

SAM: Yes, Mrs. Ormerod.

SARAH: Coom in then.

[EMMA in L. corner. Enter SAM.]

Tak' thy cap off.

SAM: Yes, Mrs. Ormerod.

SARAH: What dost want?

SAM: A've soom business 'ere. A thowt A'd find thee by thysel'. A'll coom again.

*[Bolting nervously for the door.]*

SARAH: Let that door be. Dost say tha's got business 'ere?

SAM: Aye, wi' thee. A'd like a word wi' thee private.

*[EMMA moves to open door.]*

SARAH: All reeght. Emma's just goin' to 'er dinner.

EMMA (*speaking through door*): A'll ask my moother to step in later on, Mrs. Ormerod, and thank thee very much for th' tea-pot.

SARAH: A'll be thankful if she'll coom.

*[Exit EMMA with tea-pot.]*

Now, Sam Horrocks, what's the matter wi' thee?

SAM (*dropping the cotton waste he is fumbling with and picking it up*): It's a fine day for th' time o' th' year.

SARAH: Didst want to see me private to tell me that, lad?

SAM: Naw, not exactly.

SARAH: Well, what is it then? Coom, lad, A'm waitin' on thee. Art tongue-tied? Can't tha quit mawlin' yon bit o' waste an' tell me what 'tis tha wants?

SAM (*desperately*): Mebbe it'll not be so fine in th' mornin'.

SARAH: A'll tell thee what A'd do to thee if A 'ad the use o' my 'ands, my lad. A'd coom aside thee and A'd box thy ears. If tha's got business wi' me, tha'd best state it sharp or A'll be showin' thee the shape o' my door.

SAM: Tha do fluster a feller so as A doan't know wheer A am. A've not been nagged like that theer sin' my ould moother died.

SARAH: A've 'eerd folk say Sal Horrocks were a slick un wi' 'er tongue.

SAM (*admiringly*): She were that. Rare talker she were. She'd lie theer in 'er bed all day as it might be in yon corner, an' call me all th' names she could put her tongue to, till A couldn't tell ma reeght 'and from ma left. (*Still reminiscent*) Wunnerful sperrit, she 'ad, considerin' she were bed-ridden so long. She were only a little un an' cripple an' all, but by gum she could sling it at a feller if 'er tea weren't brewed to 'er taste. Talk ! She'd talk a donkey's yead off, she would.

SARAH (*on her mettle*): An' A'll talk thy silly yead off an' all if tha doan't get sharp to tellin' me what tha wants after in my 'ouse, tha great mazed idiot.

SAM: Eh, but she were a rare un.

SARAH: The lad's daft aboot his moother.

SAM (*detachedly, looking at window. Pause.*): Wunnerful breeght the sky is, to-day.

SARAH: Tha great 'ulkin' fool. A'd tak' a broomstick to thee if—if A'd the use o' my 'ands.

SAM: Now, if that isn't just what mā moother used to say.

SARAH: Dang thy moother. An' A doan't mean no disrespect to 'er neither. She's bin in 'er grave this year an' more, poor woman.

SAM: A canna 'elp thinkin' to 'er all same. Eh, but she were wunnerful.

SARAH: An' A'd be wunnerful too. A'd talk to thee. A'd call thee if A were thy moother an' A'd to live aside 'o thee neeght an' day.

SAM (*eagerly*): Eh, by gum, but A wish tha would.

SARAH: Would what ?

SAM: Would coom an' live along wi' me.

SARAH: Tha great fool, what dost mean ? Art askin' me to wed thee ?

SAM: A didn't mean to offend thee, Mrs. Ormerod. A'm sorry A spoke. A allays do wrong thing. But A did so 'ope as tha might coom. Tha sees A got used to Moother. A got used to 'earin' 'er cuss me. A got used to doin' for 'er an' A've nought to do in th' evenings now. It's terrible

lonesome in th' neeght-time. An' when notion coom to me, A thowt as A'd mention un to thee casual.

SARAH: Dost mean it, Sam Horrocks? Dost tha know what tha's sayin', or is tha foolin' me?

SAM: O' course A mean it. Tha sees A'm not a marryin' sort. Th' lasses won't look at me. A'm silly Sam to them, A knows it. A've a slate loose, A shan't never get wed. A thowt A'd mebbe a chance wi' yon lass as were 'ere wi' thee, but hoo towld me A were too late. A allays were slow. A left askin' too long an' A've missed 'er. A gets good money, Mrs. Ormerod, but A canna talk to a young wench. They maks me go 'ot and cowld all over. An' when curate towld me as tha was to go to workus, A thowt A'd a chance wi' thee. A know'd it weren't a big chance, because my plaice ain't much cop after what tha's bin used to 'ere. A've got no fine fixin's nor big chairs an' things like as tha used to 'ave. Eh, but A would 'ave loved to do for thee as A used to do for ma moother, an' when A yeerd thee talkin' now an' callin' me a fool an' th' rest, by gum, A just yearned to 'ave thee for allays. Tha'd fill 'er plaice wunnerful well. A'd just a' loved to adopt thee.

SARAH: To adopt me?

SAM: Ay, for a moother. A'm sorry tha can't see thy way to let me. A didn't mean no offence.

*[Turning to the door.]*

SARAH: 'Ere, lad, tha tell me this. If A'd said tha might tak' me for thy moother, what wouldst ha' done?

SAM: Why, kissed thee, an' takken thee oop in ma arms whoam to thy bed. It's standin' ready in yonder wi' clean sheets an' all, an' a new quilt from Co-op. A 'opes you'll pardon th' liberty o' mentioning it.

SARAH: A new quilt, Sam? What's colour?

SAM: Red, wi' blue stripes down 'er.

SARAH: A'm not a light weight, tha knows.

SAM: A'd carry thee easy—"Strong in th' arm and weak in th' yead." It's an ould sayin', but it's a good un, an' it fits.

SARAH: Wilt tha try, Sam Horrocks? God bless thee, wilt tha try, lad?

SAM: Dost mean it, Mrs. Ormerod? Dost mean tha'll coom? Tha's not coddin' a feller, art tha?

SARAH: No, A'm not coddin'. Kiss me, Sam, my son.

*[He kisses her and lifts her in his arms.]*

SAM: By gum, but that were good. A'll coom back fur thy box.

SARAH: Carry me careful, tha great lunny. A'm not a sack o' flour.

SAM: Eh, but A likes to year thee talk. Yon was real mootherly, it were.

*[Exit through door, carrying her.]*

CURTAIN AT CLINK OF LATCH





Gilbert Cannan

MARY'S WEDDING

*A Play*

## CHARACTERS

MARY

TOM

ANN

MRS. AIREY

BILL AIREY

TWO MAIDS, VILLAGERS, and others

*This play was first performed at THE CORONET THEATRE, LONDON, in May, 1912, with the following cast :*

<i>Mary</i>	—	—	—	—	—	—	MISS IRENE ROOKE
<i>Tom</i>	—	—	—	—	—	—	MR. HERBERT LOMAS
<i>Ann</i>	—	—	—	—	—	—	MISS MARY GOULDEN
<i>Mrs. Airey</i>	—	—	—	—	—	—	MISS MURIEL PRATT
<i>Bill Airey</i>	—	—	—	—	—	—	MR. CHARLES BIBBY

NOTE.—There is no attempt made in the play to reproduce exactly the Westmoreland dialect, which would be unintelligible to ears coming new to it, but only to catch the rough music of it and the slow inflection of northern voices.

*The scene is the living-room in the Davis's cottage in the hill country. An old room low in the ceiling. ANN DAVIS is at her table in the centre of the room untying a parcel. The door opens to admit TOM DAVIS, a sturdy quarryman dressed in his best and wearing a large nosegay.*

ANN: Well, 'ast seed un?

TOM: Ay, a seed un. 'Im and 'is ugly face.

ANN (*untying her parcel*): 'Tis 'er dress come just in time an' no more from the maker-up——

TOM: Ef she wouldna do it . . .

ANN: But 'tis such long years she's been a-waitin'. . . . 'Tis long years since she bought t' dress.

TOM: An' 'tis long years she'll be a livin' wi' what she's been waitin' for; 'tis long years she'll live to think ower it and watch the thing she's taken for her man, an' long years that she'll find 'un feedin' on 'er, an' a dreary round she'll 'ave of et. . . .

ANN: Three times she 'ave come to a month of weddin', an' three times 'e 'ave broke loose and gone down to the Mortal Man, an' the woman that keeps 'alf our men in drink. . . . 'Tis she is the wicked one, giving 'em score an' score again 'till they owe more than they can ever pay with a year's money.

TOM: 'Tis a fearful thing is drink. . . .

ANN: So I telled 'er in the beginnin' of it all, knowin' what like of man 'e was. An' so I telled 'er last night only.

TOM: She be set on it?

ANN: Ay, an' 'ere's t' pretty dress for 'er to be wedded in. . . .

TOM: What did she say?

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ANN: Twice she 'ave broke wi' 'im, and twice she 'ave said that ef 'e never touched the drink for six months she would go to be churched wi' 'im. She never 'ave looked at another man.

TOM: Aye, she be one o' they quiet ones that goes about their work an' never 'as no romantical notions, but love only the more for et. There've been men come for 'er that are twice the man that Bill is, but she never looks up from 'er work at 'em.

ANN: I think she must 'a' growed up lovin' Bill. 'Tis a set thing surely.

TOM: An' when that woman 'ad 'im again an' 'ad 'im roaring drunk fur a week, she never said owt but turned to 'er work agin an' set aside the things she was makin' agin the weddin'. . . .

ANN: What did 'e say to 'er?

TOM: Nowt. 'E be 'most chary o' words as she. 'E've got the 'ouse an' everything snug, and while 'e works 'e makes good money.

ANN: 'Twill not end, surely.

TOM: There was 'is father and two brothers all broken men by it.

*[She hears MARY on the stairs, and they are silent.]*

ANN: 'Ere's your pretty dress, Mary.

MARY: Ay. . . . Thank ye, Tom.

TOM: 'Twill be lovely for ye, my dear, an' grand. 'Tis a fine day fur yer weddin', my dear. . . .

MARY: I'll be sorry to go, Tom.

TOM: An' sorry we'll be to lose ye. . . .

MARY: I'll put the dress on.

*[She throws the frock over her arm and goes out with it.]*

ANN: Another girl would 'a' wedded him years ago in the first foolishness of it. But Mary, for all she says so little, 'as long, long thoughts that never comes to the likes o' you and me. . . . Another girl, when the day 'ad come at last, would



'a' been wild wi' the joy an' the fear o' it. . . . But Mary, she's sat on the fells under the stars, an' windin' among the sheep. D'ye mind the nights she's been out like an old shepherd wi' t' sheep? D'ye mind the nights when she was but a lile one an' we found 'er out in the dawn sleepin' snug again the side o' a fat ewe?

TOM: 'Tis not like a weddin' day for 'er. . . . If she'd 'ad a new dress, now.

ANN: I said to 'er would she 'ave a new dress; but she would 'ave only the old one, cut an' shaped to be in the fashion. . . . Et 'as been a strange courtin', an' 'twill be a strange life for 'em both, I'm thinkin', for there seems no gladness in 'er, nor never was, for she never was foolish an' she never was young; but she was always like there was a great weight on 'er, so as she must be about the world alone, but always she 'ave turned to the little things an' the weak, an' always she 'ad some poor sick beast for tendin' or some other woman's babe to 'old to 'er breast, an' I think sometimes that 'tis only because Bill is a poor sick beast wi' a poor sick soul that she be so set on 'im.

TOM: 'E be a sodden beast wi' never a soul to be saved or damned.

ANN: 'Cept for the drink, 'e've been a good son to 'is old mother when the others 'ud 'a' left 'er to rot i' the ditch, an' 'e was the on'y one as 'ud raise a finger again his father when the owd man, God rest him, was on to 'er like a madman. Drunk or sober 'e always was on 'is mother's side.

TOM: 'Twas a fearful 'ouse that.

ANN: 'Twas wonderful that for all they did to 'er, that wild old man wi' 'is wild young sons, she outlived 'em all, but never a one could she save from the curse that was on them, an', sober, they was the likeliest men i' Troutbeck. . . .

TOM: 'Tis when the rain comes and t' clouds come low an' black on the fells and the cold damp eats into a man's bones that the fearful thoughts come to 'im that must be drowned or 'im go mad an' only the foreigners like me or them as 'as foreign blood new in 'em can 'old out again it; 'tis the curse o' livin' too long between two line o' 'ills.

ANN: An' what that owd woman could never do, d'ye think our Mary'll do it? 'Im a Troutbeck man an' she a Troutbeck girl?

TOM: She've 'eld to 'er bargain an' brought 'im to it.

ANN: There's things that a maid can do that a wife cannot an' that's truth, an' shame it is to the man. (*Comes a knock at the door.*) 'Tisn't time for t' weddin' folk.

[TOM goes to the window.

TOM: Gorm. 'Tis Mrs. Airey.

ANN: T'owd woman. She that 'as not been further than 'er garden gate these ten years?

[*She goes to the door, opens it to admit MRS. AIREY, an old gaunt woman just beginning to be bent with age.*

MRS. AIREY: Good day to you, Tom Davis.

TOM: Good day to you, Mrs. Airey.

MRS. AIREY: Good day to you, Ann Davis.

ANN: Good day to you, Mrs. Airey. Will ye sit down?

[*She dusts a chair and MRS. AIREY sits by the fireside. She sits silent for a long while. TOM and ANN look uneasily at her and at each other.*

MRS. AIREY: So 'tis all ready for Bill's wedding.

TOM: Aye. 'Tis a fine day, an' the folks bid, and the sharry-bang got for to drive to Coniston, all the party of us. Will ye be coming, Mrs. Airey?

MRS. AIREY: I'll not. (*MRS. AIREY sits silent again for long.*) Is Mary in the 'ouse?

ANN: She'll be upstairs puttin' on 'er weddin' dress.

MRS. AIREY: 'Tis the sad day of 'er life. . . . They're a rotten lot, an' who should know et better than me? Bill's the best of 'em, but Bill's rotten. . . . Six months is not enough, nor six years nor sixty, not while 'er stays in Troutbeck rememberin' all that 'as been an' all the trouble that was in the 'ouse along o' it, and so I've come for to say it.

ANN: She growed up lovin' Bill, and 'tis a set thing. She've waited long years. 'Tis done now, an' what they make for theirselves they make, an' 'tis not for us to go speirin' for the trouble they may make for theirselves, but only to pray that it may pass them by . . .

MRS. AIREY: But 'tis certain. . . . Six months is not enough, nor six years nor sixty.

ANN: And are ye come for to tell Mary this?

MRS. AIREY: This and much more. . . .

TOM: And what 'ave ye said to Bill?

MRS. AIREY: Nowt. There never was a son would give 'eed to 'is mother. . . . 'Tisn't for 'im I'm thinkin', but for t' children that she'll bear to 'im. I 'oped, and went on 'opin' 'till there was no 'ope left in me, and I lived to curse the day that each of my sons was born. John and Peter are dead an' left no child behind, and it were better for Bill also to leave no child behind. There's a day and 'alf a day o' peace and content for a woman with such a man, and there's long, long years of thinkin' on the peace and content that's gone. There's long years of watching the child that you've borne and suckled turn rotten, an' I say that t' birth-pangs are nowt to t' pangs that ye 'ave from the childer of such a man as Bill or Bill's father. . . . She's a strong girl, an' a good girl; but there's this that is stronger than 'er.

[MARY comes again, very pretty in her blue dress. She is at once sensible of the strangeness in TOM and ANN. She stands looking from one to the other. MRS. AIREY sits gazing into the fire.]

MARY: Why, Mother. . . . 'Tis kind of you to come in this morning.

MRS. AIREY: Aye, 'tis kind of me.

[ANN steals away upstairs, and TOM, taking the lead from her, goes out into the road.]

MRS. AIREY: Come 'ere, my pretty.

[MARY goes and stands by her.]

MARY: The sun is shining and the bees all out and busy to gather in the 'oney.

MRS. AIREY: 'Tis the bees as is the wise people to work away in t' dark when t' sun is hidden, and to work away in t' sun when 'tis bright and light. 'Tis the bees as is t' wise people that takes their men an' kills 'em for the 'arm that they may do, and it's us that's the foolish ones ever to give a thought to their needs that give never a one to ours.

MARY: 'Tis us that's t' glorious ones to 'elp them that is so weak, and 'tis us that's the brave and the kind ones to let 'em 'ave the 'ole world to play with when they will give never a thought to us that gives it t' 'em.

MRS. AIREY: My pretty, my pretty, there's never a one of us can 'elp a man that thinks 'isself a man an' strong, poor fool, an' there's never a one of us can 'elp a man that's got a curse on 'im and is rotten through to t' bone, an' not one day can you be a 'elp to such a man as this. . . .

MARY: There's not one day that I will not try, and not one day that I will not fight to win 'im back. . . .

MRS. AIREY: The life of a woman is a sorrowful thing. . . .

MARY: For all its sorrow, 'tis a greater thing than t' life of a man . . . an' so I'll live it. . . .

MRS. AIREY: Now you're strong and you're young. 'Ope's with ye still and life's all before ye—and so I thought when my day came, and so I did. There was a day and 'alf a day of peace and content, and there was long, long years of thinkin' on the peace and content that are gone. . . . Four men all gone the same road, and me left looking down the way that they are gone and seeing it all black as the pit. . . . I be a poor old woman now with never a creature to come near me in kindness, an' I was such a poor old woman before ever the 'alf of life was gone, and so you'll be if you take my son for your man. He's the best of my sons, but I curse the day that ever he was born. . . .

MARY: There was never a man the like of Bill. If ye see 'un striding the 'ill, ye know 'tis a man by 'is strong, long stride; and if ye see 'un leapin' an' screein' down th' 'ill, ye know 'tis a strong man . . .

MRS. AIREY: An' if ye see un lyin' drunk i' the ditch, not roarin' drunk, but rotten drunk, wi' 'is face fouled an' 'is



clothes mucked, ye know 'tis the lowest creature of the world. . . .

[MARY *stands staring straight in front of her.*

MARY: Is it for this that ye come to me to-day?

MRS. AIREY: Ay, for this: that ye may send un back to 'is rottenness, for back to it 'e'll surely go when 'tis too late, an' you a poor old woman like me, with never a creature to come near ye in kindness, before ever the bloom 'as gone from your bonny cheeks, an' maybe childer that'll grow up bonny an' then be blighted for all the tenderness ye give to them; an' those days will be the worst of all—far worse than the day when ye turn for good an' all into yourself from t' man that will give ye nowt. . . . 'Tis truly the bees as is the wise people. . . .

MARY: It's a weary waitin' that I've had, and better the day and 'alf a day of peace and content with all the long years of thinking on it than all the long, long years of my life to go on waitin' and waitin' for what has passed me by, for if he be the rottenest, meanest man in t' world that ever was made, there is no other that I can see or ever will. It is no wild foolishness that I am doing; I never was like that; but it is a thing that's growed wi' me an' is a part o' me—an' though every day o' my life were set before me now so that I could see to the very end, an' every day sadder and blacker than the last, I'd not turn back. I gave 'im the bargain, years back now, and three times 'e 'as failed me; but 'e sets store by me enough to do this for me a fourth time. 'Twas kind of ye to come. . . .

MRS. AIREY: You're strong an' you're young, but there's this that is stronger than yourself.

MARY: Maybe, but 'twill not be for want o' fighting' wi' it.

MRS. AIREY: 'Twill steal on ye when you're weakest, an' come on ye in your greatest need. . . .

MARY: It 'as come to this day an' there is no goin' back. D'ye think I've not seed t' soft, gentle things that are given to other women, an' not envied them? D'ye think I've not seed 'em walkin' shut-eyed into all sorts of foolishness an' never askin' for the trewth o' it, and not envied 'em for



doin' that? D'ye think I've not seed the girls I growed up wi' matin' lightly an' lightly weddin', an' not envied 'em for that, they wi' a 'ouse an' babes an' me drudgin' away on t' farm, me wi' my man to 'and an' only this agin 'im? D'ye think I've not been tore in two wi' wantin' to close my eyes an' walk like others into it an' never think what is to come? There's many an' many a night that I've sat there under the stars wi' t' three counties afore me an' t' sea, an' t' lake below, an' t' sheep croppin', an' my own thoughts for all the comp'ny that I 'ad, an' fightin' this way an' that for to take un an' let un be so rotten as ever 'e might be; an' there's many an' many a night when the thoughts come so fast that they hurt me an' I lay pressed close to t' ground wi' my 'ands clawin' at it an' me teeth bitin' into t' ground for to get closer an' 'ide from myself; an' many a night when I sat there seein' the man as t' brave lad 'e was when I seed un first leapin' down the 'ill, an' knowin' that nothin' in the world, nothin' that I could do to un or that 'e could do 'isself, would ever take that from me. . . . In all the time o' my weary waitin' there 'as never been a soul that I told so much to, an' God knows there never 'as been an' never will be a time when I can tell as much to 'im. . . .

MRS. AIREY: My pretty, my pretty, 'tis a waste, an' a wicked, wicked waste. . . .

MARY: 'Tis a day an' 'alf a day agin never a moment. . . .

MRS. AIREY: 'Tis that, and so 'tis wi' all o' us . . . an' so 'twill be. . . . God bless ye, my dear. . . .

[ANN comes down. MARY is looking out of the window.

ANN: Ye forgot the ribbon for yer 'air, that I fetched 'specially fro' t' town.

MARY: Why, yes. Will ye tie it, Ann?

[ANN ties the ribbon in her hair.

MRS. AIREY: Pretty, my dear, oh! so pretty.

MARY: I'm to walk to t' church o' Tom's arm? . . .

ANN: An' I to Tom's left; wi' the bridesmaids be'ind, an' the rest a-followin'. . . .

[TOM returns, followed by TWO GIRLS bringing armfuls of flowers. With these they deck the room, and keep the choicest blooms for MARY. ANN and the three girls are busied with making MARY reach her most beautiful. MRS. AIREY goes. At intervals one VILLAGER and another comes to give greeting or to bring some small offering of food or some small article of clothing. MARY thanks them all with rare natural grace. They call her "fine," and ejaculate remarks of admiration: "The purty bride . . ." "She's beautiful . . ." "'Tis a lucky lad, Bill Airey. . . ." The church bell begins to ring. . . . All is prepared and all are ready. . . . MARY is given her gloves, which she draws on—when the door is thrown open and BILL AIREY lunges against the lintel of the door and stands leering. He is just sober enough to know what he is at. He is near tears, poor wretch. He is not horribly drunk; he stands surveying the group and they him.

BILL: I come—I come—I—I c-come for to—to—to—show—to show myself. . . .

[He turns in utter misery and goes. MARY plucks the flowers from her bosom and lets them fall to the ground; draws her gloves off her hands and lets them fall. The bell continues to ring.

CURTAIN



Conrad C. Carter

A PIECE OF CHINA

*A Comedy*

## CHARACTERS

RACHEL BIRNBAUM

ADOLF RICHTER

LEAH RICHTER

CLIFFORD DIGBY

HERMAN MARKS

AUTHOR'S NOTE:—This is not a propaganda play. It is a simple, homely comedy, without caricature.

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SCENE: *The living-room above ADOLF RICHTER's antique shop in South Kensington. An autumn evening. Present day.*

ADOLF RICHTER's living-room is a plainly furnished apartment used partly as an office, partly as a sitting-room, and partly as a repository of the more cherished of RICHTER's treasures.

A table R.C., with papers, files, account-books, a few pieces of antique silver, a battery of magnifying-glasses and a small, white statuette. Chairs above and to R. and L. of the table, and above the fireplace L. Down R., a tall cabinet, the lower part with drawers, the upper shelves protected by panelled glass doors. Sideboard up C. Bureau up R.

There is a door C. and another up L., above the fireplace, which is in the L. wall. There are windows in the R. wall, above the cabinet.

All the furniture is old, but genuine, and beautifully polished. Only the table is untidy with its litter, and this fact is most apparent by contrast with the remainder of the room.

On the rise of the curtain there is only the light of the fire and that from a small reading-lamp on the table. RACHEL, a stout Jewess in black, about sixty years of age, is sweeping up the ashes in the grate. On replacing the brush on its hook, she turns and crosses C., flicking imaginary dust from her hands by brushing palm against palm. She surveys the chaos of the table with disgust, and after a glance over her shoulder towards the door up L. begins to straighten matters up, when ADOLF RICHTER enters.

ADOLF RICHTER is at least seventy-five years of age, but far from senile, physically or mentally. True, he tends to shuffle rather than walk, his speech is slow unless he is much moved, but there is a sharpness of eye and a readiness of smile or frown which marks the yet agile mind.

He is dressed in a black, loose-fitting jacket, nondescript trousers,

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The play is published by Messrs. Samuel French at 1s. net.

*an old-fashioned linen collar of the Gladstone type, and a smoking-cap and carpet slippers. He uses old-fashioned pince-nez on a broad ribbon.*

RACHEL *does not hear him. He advances to C., regarding her with an expression in which wrath struggles for mastery with amusement. RACHEL is by now thoroughly enjoying her forbidden activities.*

*For a moment there is silence.*

ADOLF: Too soon.

RACHEL (*jumping round*): Ach !

ADOLF: I say to you—too soon. In other wordts, you heff anticipated the right moment.

RACHEL: What do you mean ?

ADOLF: God of my fathers ! Do you hear her ? She asks me, what do I mean !

RACHEL: And again I am asking, what is it, Adolf, that is worrying you ?

ADOLF: The furniture you may polish, Rachel Birnbaum, the carpet may be swept, you may wear out your knees, endt your arms, endt your eyes, with cleaning my house, but not, NOT until I am in Abraham's bosom shall you *touch—my—table* !

RACHEL: Ai !

ADOLF: One place I will heff in my house where I can be as untidy as I like to be. Between you end Leah, I becoming too respectable to be heppy. This is not Hempstead where my friend Leon Meyerwitz lives, but Kensington where a chentleman is entitled to one little spot of untidiness to play in, eh ?

RACHEL: I suppose so. But to-morrow is Friday, and also have you forgotten, Adolf, that this evening Leah brings her *goy* to see us ?

ADOLF: *Goy* ? Be careful now, Rachel, you do not use that word in front of him. Endt Leah does not like it either.

*[He moves to the fire and switches on the lights.]*

RACHEL: Why does she not choose a man of our faith, Adolf ? (*C.*) If I was her grandfather I would not let her take a *goy*. I would lock her in her room, I would——

ADOLF: I am quite sure you would do some very foolish things, Rachel. Now do a sensible one for the present, endt get ready something for us to eat when Leah and her young chentleman arrive. I heff a lot of work yet already that I heff not attended to.

RACHEL: Ach, yes, to get ready the food—to clean the house—that is all Rachel Birnbaum is good for. (*She goes up to C.*) But it is a pity, Adolf, you will not listen to a woman, for what a woman says to you is sometimes wise.

ADOLF: Yes, Rachel, but not *always* wise, like what I say to myself.

[*Door-slam off.*]

End that is Leah, already.

[*RACHEL disappears, and ADOLF crosses R. and settles down to opening letters.*]

Mrs. Haffkin, ach !—Heilbron and Schultz—yes—a bill—another bill—Lady Chiselhurst, so ! (*Reads*) “ Will Mr. Richter kindly call ”—No, Mr. Richter will not kindly call—Rosenberg—a bill——

[*Enter LEAH. She is twenty-five, tall, beautiful, and only faintly Hebraic in appearance. She wears good, quiet, outdoor clothes.*]

(*Rising.*) Leah !

LEAH: Hello, darling !

[*She kisses him affectionately.*]

ADOLF (*in kindly mimicry*): Hello, dar-ling ! Jost like the young lady on the fillums. Ah, but I am glad to heff you beck ! But where is the chentleman friend, Mr. Digby, eh ?

LEAH: He—he’s just parking the car, and he has to ’phone someone. He won’t be long.

ADOLF: So. Now Rachel is getting the supper, so you sit down and talk to me.

LEAH: And what about ?

ADOLF: Leah ! Heff you not always talked to me ? Ach, I see ! You think I was going to read you a lecture, scold you ? Ach, no, no ! Just talk to me about anything, for perhaps it is not very long before I heff not my Leah to talk to.

LEAH (*perching on the arm of his chair*): That's quite enough ! You know perfectly well you'll have me as long as I have you. All you're doing is to try very hard to be sorry for yourself, and it doesn't suit you a bit. And put all that work away. You can't talk to a lady and work at the same time.

ADOLF: Do you hear her ? I can't talk *and* work ? But look at it, Leah—bills, bills, nothing but bills, and where the money to pay wit is to come from already, only the God of my fathers can tell me !

LEAH: And so he must get rid of his expensive granddaughter to a rich husband !

ADOLF: Do not say that, Leah, *efen* in joking. It hurts me, here.

[*He taps his heart.*]

LEAH: Sorry, dear. Do you really owe so much ?

ADOLF: Leah, not half of it can you imagine ! Howeffe, I dare say I heff something up my sleeves. Always, my rule in life has been, keep something in reserfe, whether it is money, or knowledge, or whateffer it is. Something you do not show the world.

LEAH: That sounds terribly deceitful.

[ADOLF *chuckles.*]

ADOLF: Ach, but business is bad, Leah.

LEAH: You wicked old man—I never heard you say it was good.

[*She crosses to the armchair L.*]

ADOLF: You are wrong, Leah. Do you remember when I made fifty pounds out of Isadore Hatzfeldt over that miniature ? I remember saying, " Good business " to you. That is once, at least, Leah ; now admit it like a good girl. " Good business," I said.

LEAH: All right, have it your own way. What you really said was, " Not such bad business."

ADOLF: The same thing. I only hope, Leah, that this young man you are wanting to merry has more money than I heff, or it is going to be hard times for you. Very hard indeed.

LEAH (*smiling*): You don't want me to marry a bit, do you ?



ADOLF: Not want you to merry? You make me out very selfish, Leah, and that is not kindt. But surely I want you to merry. I want to see you settled in your own home, end I want to come round to it, and to play wit my great-grandchildren, end everything so. I will admit to you, Leah, I shall be lonely, but well—my cousin, Rachel Birnbaum, can still look after me. Not so nicely as you heff looked after me. Rachel will neffer let me have so much my own way, but still, she will do.

LEAH: You should come and live with us.

ADOLF: No. That would not do. Young people are not happy so. Besides, I am old, now. It is not so long before I shall be gathered to my fathers, and until then I think I can stand Rachel end her ways.

LEAH: Please! You make it all so cruel.

[*She comes R.C. to him.*]

ADOLF: Oi! That is foolish! You think I am sentimental about dying, Leah? There is nothing sentimental about it at all. It will be a nice rest. All the same, there are some things I would like to do first. (*He chuckles.*) I should like to live for one more Yom Kippur, endt I should like to sell Isaac Schnittler some silver at twice its value if the Almighty will grant me the privilege!

LEAH: You are much more likely to listen to his story of a sick wife and eight children.

ADOLF: You think so? Certainly I will *listen* to it, but that is all. But now, Leah! You think I do not like it because you wish to merry a—a *goy*. You do not mind *I* use that wordt? (*He rises.*) It is not so. I will not deny to you I would be more heppy if you had chosen to take yourself the faith of my fathers, but—I understand. Also, if you had married a Jew. But that, also, I understand.

LEAH: Dear!

[*They embrace.*]

ADOLF: I do not forget your mother. You follow her. End so, if it is not to be, it is not to be. (*He regards LEAH steadily.*) But! But, of one thing I must be sure. That he is a good man.



LEAH (*laughing nervously*): Of course he is !

ADOLF (*gravely*): Conscience is greater than religion, Leah. (*Strongly*) Honour is greater than faiths. Always remember—honour is greater than faiths.

LEAH (*turning away a little*): I know.

ADOLF (*watching her for a moment, and then sitting*): Why do you lof this young man, Leah ?

LEAH (*sitting by the fire*): I don't know. (*With a little laugh*) The usual reasons, I suppose.

ADOLF: Because he is handsome. Because he is able to say nice things. Because you like the idea of being his wife. Eh ? Because he is one of the few Christians you heff met, end the nicest of them. All very good reasons, my Leah, so long as you are *sure*.

LEAH: Sure I love him ?

ADOLF: No. Sure he is good enough to be your husband end the father of your children. You must be sure, and I, your grendfather, must be sure he is worthy of my, of my——

[*He has risen and crosses L.*

LEAH: Your " Rose of Sharon."

[*She smiles.*

ADOLF: Yes. (*Very softly*) It is what I called your grend-mother—the Almighty grant her eternal peace—endt it is what you heff been to me since your mother placed you in my arms. In the language of the Jew there is no more sweeter name. " Rose of Sharon ! "

LEAH: You spoil me, you know.

ADOLF: And that is one of the few luxuries I can still afford.

LEAH: I love you more than anyone in the whole world.

ADOLF: Oi ! Oi ! Endt I heff tried to bring you up to speak the truth !

LEAH (*laughs and ruffles his hair, pushing his smoking-cap askew*): You're a bad old man, and I hate you !

ADOLF (*pretending to be angry*): Ach, do not do that ! It is a liberty efen Rachel Birnbaum would not take !

LEAH: I'll tell her how much you like it.

ADOLF: Rachel will heff more sense than to believe you——

*[Door-bell off.]*

LEAH: That's Clifford.

*[She passes ADOLF to her L.]*

ADOLF: Ach, well, let Rachel go.

LEAH: No, I will. She's busy.

*[Exit LEAH up C.]*

ADOLF (*good-humouredly*): Clifford! Digby! What a name for Leah to carry, ach! (*He crosses to the table, puts on the pince-nez, and examines the statuette closely.*) Oho! (*He exchanges the pince-nez for a magnifier.*) Lieb Gott in Himmel, I was right, already! (*Softly to himself*) Y-es. Oho! Ho—ho—ho! (*He chuckles*) What a choke! what a—— (*He turns, and sees who has entered.*) Ach, come in, Mr. Digby, how are you?—yes—come in endt sit down. I was jost heving a glance—but neffer mind thet, now you are here.

*[He bustles about his table.]*

DIGBY: Good evening, Mr. Richter.

ADOLF: Ach, now, endt I did not shake hendes! Leah, we must heff supper soon, but first Mr. Digby will heff a cigar, isn't it?

LEAH: I'll go and help Rachel.

DIGBY: Must you?

ADOLF: Did you hear him? "Must you?" he asks it! But always Leah helps, and always she knows when the chentlemen would like a cigar to themselves.

LEAH (*smiling*): I shan't be very long.

*[She exits C.]*

ADOLF: Sit down, now, Mr. Digby, while I get the cigars.

*[DIGBY sits above the fire. He is a rather dashing young man about thirty, very smartly dressed, too much so, with an air of being faintly amused and scornful of those about him.]*

DIGBY: That's very nice of you.

*[ADOLF gets the cigars from the cabinet.]*

ADOLF (*with an ironic attempt to be English that escapes DIGBY*): Don't mention it. (*Quite naturally*) It is a good cigar. I had them from a stockbroker who could not settle his bill. He let me heff his furniture instead of two hundred pounds, and the cigars were the interest.

DIGBY: Really?

ADOLF: Yes, really!

DIGBY: Good business.

ADOLF: No, very bad, because, although the principal was solid enough, the interest goes up in smoke!

[*They both laugh as they light up.*]

Some whisky?

DIGBY: Thanks so much.

ADOLF (*going to the lower part of the cabinet*): I really bought *this*, you know. Although I am a Jew it is not eferytthing I heff that was taken for a debt.

DIGBY: Really?

ADOLF: Ach, no! (*Apparently oblivious to the rudeness of DIGBY's remark*) Well, well! End so you are wanting to merry my Leah, isn't it?

DIGBY (*slowly—and with faint insolence*): That certainly is so.

ADOLF (*handing DIGBY the whisky he has poured out*): Ah! End my Leah is wanting also to merry you.

DIGBY: So she says. Do you mind?

ADOLF (*raising his glass*): *Mahzel-tov.*

DIGBY: Eh?

ADOLF (*with extreme courtesy*): I beg your pardon. I should heff said, "Good health."

DIGBY: Oh, I see! Cheero.

[*They drink.*]

ADOLF: Well, now, about this merriage. I will not say yes, end I will not say no.

DIGBY (*calmly, with a slight shrug*): Oh.

ADOLF: I will not deny to you, Mr. Digby, thet neturally I should heff liked it better if she had not chosen a—a *goy*.

DIGBY: A what?

ADOLF: A *goy*. The word is not an insult, Mr. Digby; it is only what we use for one who is not of our faith. Leah's mother was a *goy*, and she was one of the best women I heff efer known. My Leah has all her charming ways.

DIGBY: I thought so. (*Coolly*) I know Leah quite well, you know.

ADOLF: My son, her father, was a good man. He was killed in the War. You understand, Mr. Digby, that Leah's happiness is eferthing to me. I heff been father end mother to her. And I must be sure that not only will she be well provided for, but that her husband is all that he should be.

DIGBY: Really. (*Seeing ADOLF's eyes on him he decides to humour him.*) Well now, Mr. Richter, what do you want to ask me?

ADOLF: Not very much. You see, we Jews are rather proud of being good judges of character. But, of course, you can understand my asking, for instance, if you are doing well in business, what you heff to offer Leah in the way of a home, and all those things.

DIGBY (*briskly*): I'm in the motor trade, Mr. Richter, and I suppose I can reckon on about four hundred a year.

ADOLF: You suppose—four hond— (*He suppresses his disappointment.*) Ach, well, no doubt you can be more exact about it all later on, isn't it?

DIGBY (*coldly*): No doubt. And in the meantime, as Leah does not seem to be very worried about it—

ADOLF: Ach, yes—yes. That is the trouble with the yong people, they do *not* worry about it. It is left to the old ones! You see, Mr. Digby, I heff not much to give her. I am old now, and I do not do a big business like what I used to do years and years ago. But still I keep a business head for the important things, and so we must heff another chat about it one day soon, eh?

DIGBY: Quite. I think you can set your mind at rest, Mr. Richter.

ADOLF: Endt that will be very pleasant, Mr. Digby. But it is right that you should know that among our people we heff the custom, efen in these days when things are so



modern, end so different, of making sure that our daughters merry the right kindt of man. Sure, always, before we say "*Mahzel-tov*, and may the Almighty bless your union."

[DIGBY rises and looks about.

DIGBY (*changing the subject*): You have some very nice things here, Mr. Richter.

ADOLF: Nice things? Nice things, you tell me? Well! well! But you heff no idea what nice things I heff! Now, of course, we can enchoy ourselves, as Leah says. I will show you. You see this little statue here? It came to me as chenuine, without a flaw. The date of it, the maker, efery-thing. But now! One glance wit my magnifier and I see—what is it I see? Thet it is tresh! End tresh is a thing I never heff in my house—

[Enter RACHEL, C.

RACHEL: Adolf. Excuse me. (*To DIGBY*) Good evening—

ADOLF: Ach, Rachel, this is Mr. Digby.

DIGBY: How d'you do?

RACHEL: Thank you. Excuse me. (*To ADOLF*) Adolf, here is Herman Marks come to see you already.

ADOLF: Herman Marks? Are you *sure*?

RACHEL: Am I blind, Adolf Richter, that I do not know Herman Marks when I see him?

ADOLF: All right! All right! Herman Marks! Ach, but that is a nuisance! I tell him to come and see me one efening, but nefer did I think he would come to-night. Ach! But I can't ask him to go away after coming all the way from Brondesbury Park. You do not mind, Mr. Digby? He is one of our oldest friends.

DIGBY: Why, of course not.

RACHEL: He is in the dining-room, talking to Leah.

ADOLF: Then, Rachel, please ask him to come in. Is the food ready?

RACHEL: I have nearly finished. And then, Adolf, I go home—

ADOLF: But you will eat wit us?



RACHEL: No, Adolf. I have a lot of work to do in my own place already, and you have business, and I am tired. Good night. Excuse me, Mr. Digby, isn't it? Good night—good night. (*At the door*) And do not forget, Adolf, what I tell you about what I tell you about!

[Exit RACHEL.]

ADOLF (*laughing*): Hey! Yes! But she is a good woman, endt like all women, mysterious. The great secret is not to take much notice, eh?

DIGBY: You were telling me about the statue——

ADOLF: So I was! Endt I said it was tresh, which in my house I neffer heff. Chenuine things, endt chenuine people. I cannot heff fakes—whether they are statues or men!

[Enter LEAH, with HERMAN MARKS. *The latter is fifty to fifty-five, a handsome man, well dressed, but not flashily. He speaks with the very slightest Jewish accent, has plenty of humour and charm, coupled with a brisk business manner. ADOLF and MARKS shake hands.*

Herman Marks, my friend, I am gled to see you. (*He goes C.*) Sit down. No, first, this is Mr. Digby, a great friend of Leah's. (*Proudly*) Now, Mr. Digby, this is Mr. Marks——

[*The men shake hands.*

DIGBY: How d'you do?

MARKS: How d'you do, Mr. Digby?

LEAH: You'll have a drink, Mr. Marks?

[*She goes up L. to the sideboard.*

ADOLF: Yes, end sit down, now! A cigar, Herman—I know you like a cigar.

MARKS: The stockbroker's?

ADOLF: Why, of course, yes! I heff told Mr. Digby the choke.

[*LEAH is busy with wine, etc.*

Mr. Digby is in the motor business.

MARKS: Is that so?

ADOLF: End he is wanting to merry Leah, Herman.

MARKS: No ! Our little Leah going to be married, eh ? Is that so ? You're a lucky man, Mr. Digby. I always say if I was single and twenty years younger, I would have——

LEAH: You have a glass of wine, Mr. Marks, and don't talk such nonsense.

*[She hands him a glass of wine.]*

MARKS: "Nonsense !" Did you hear that ? And I used to have her on my knee, and she used to call me Uncle Herman ! Gracious ! How old it makes you feel, eh ?

LEAH: You see what I have to suffer here, Clifford. A cigarette, please.

DIGBY: Right.

*[Business with LEAH.]*

MARKS: And Leah ! My Lionel, too, he is going to get married. To Rosie Schönberg !

LEAH: Really ? Give him my best wishes.

MARKS: I will ! I will !

ADOLF: Schönberg ! Her father is Barney Schönberg—I remember—fillum theatres, eh ?

LEAH: Come down and have supper, Clifford. They're going to talk business.

ADOLF: Ach, no. We all eat together, isn't it ? First we heff a smoke end a drink end a talk, end then food. Mr. Digby is a business man, end he is going to merry you. So he will like to see how we do it, eh ?

LEAH (*to* DIGBY): Heavens, are you really interested ?

DIGBY (*after a momentary hesitation*): Why, of course. You come and sit by me.

LEAH: No. I've a lot to do. I'll have to open some new stuff from Appenrodt's for you, Uncle Herman.

MARKS: Appenrodt's ! Good, Leah ! But I don't know if I can stop.

ADOLF: But certainly he will eat with us.

LEAH: Oh, yes, you can. I'll be back later.

DIGBY: You don't mind, Leah ?

LEAH: I do, but what can a poor girl do with three *business men* ?

MARKS (*as LEAH goes out*): She's a good girl, Leah. Well ! well !

ADOLF (*busy with drinks, cigars, etc.*): Now, Herman, what is it ? (*He goes C.*) Hey ! Something up his sleef he has it, you see if I am right ! Don't you tell me you heff called to sell Adolf Richter something, Herman, because Adolf Richter is not buying.

MARKS: It's a long time since I sold you something, Richter, don't you worry.

ADOLF: Then perhaps you will *buy* something for a change, eh ? (*To DIGBY*) You know, Mr. Digby, Mr. Marks here is a great buyer——

DIGBY: Is that so ?

ADOLF: Oh, a great buyer is Mr. Herman Marks ! Sometimes a picture, sometimes furniture, sometimes silver, sometimes——

DIGBY: Sometimes a car, eh ? Glad to see you round Great Portland Street, any time, Mr. Marks.

MARKS: I shouldn't wonder.

ADOLF: H. M. knows how to make money, Mr. Digby. That is one reason I am glad to see him to-night. This is private, but still, wit you it doesn't matter, eh ? Listen, Herman——

MARKS: Oho ! What's this coming now, Richter ?

[*He winks at DIGBY.*]

ADOLF: Now don't interrupt, Herman, because this is important. (*Pause.*) Herman, I must raise some money. At once. Things are bed, very bed, end so, as I heff something special to sell, I come to you.

MARKS: To me ? And what is it you want to sell, then ?

ADOLF: I do not *want* to sell it. I *heff* to. (*Pause.*) Something, which should mean more to me than—— (*He goes down R.*) I show you.

MARKS: Well, I don't know. It's got to be good, Richter.

ADOLF (*stops R.C.*): Good? Did you hear him? Did you hear that? Good, he tells me! Since when heff I shown you, Herman Marks, something that is not good?

MARKS (*amused*): About a year ago.

ADOLF (*laughing*): Yes, but I did not try to sell it to you.

MARKS: You knew better.

ADOLF: Of course, yes, surely I knew better. When I am talking to Herman Marks I am talking to a business man, end it is no use trying to deceive him. But wait till I show you this, Herman. It is beautiful. (*He goes to the bureau down R. Both men watch him with interest. He brings out a specimen of fine lustre ware.*) There! (*He goes R.C.*) Now what is it you heff to say to that?

MARKS (*taking it*): Let's have a look.

ADOLF (*anxiously*): Don't drop it! Be careful, Herman Marks, now.

MARKS (*soothingly*): All right! All right!

[*He turns it over lovingly in his hands.*]

*There is perfect silence during the examination. RICHTER is near MARKS on his R. DIGBY approaches on his L., and watches rather superciliously. After a long pause.*

M—m. (*He turns the vase round again.*) M—m. You really want to sell this, Adolf Richter?

ADOLF: I heff told you before, I heff no choice. I would not tell eferone thet, because they would beat me down. Now you, Herman, will not do thet. But money I must raise it. So—there it is, already.

MARKS: What about a loan?

ADOLF: No. What is the good, eh?—of borrowing money from one person to pay another? You still owe it, Herman.

MARKS: But still——

ADOLF: Listen, Herman. This—this beautiful piece of china—it was my mother's. I lof it. Of all the tings she gafe me, I lof it most. It was a wedding present to her, end then a wedding present to me. I hed hoped it might heff been a wedding present to Leah, but what can I do? My business now has for a long time been wit little things end my whole



stock is less than it efer was. Besides, it is at once I must heff the money. I heff no choice.

MARKS: I had no idea things were so bad.

ADOLF: Herman, look at me. Would I tell you now——

MARKS: All right ! All right ! (*Pause, caressing vase.*) It's worth every bit of sixty pounds.

[DIGBY looks a little incredulous.

ADOLF: Sixty pounds ! Did you hear him, Mr. Digby ? Sixty pounds ! God of my fathers ! Who has robbed you of your intelligence, Herman, that you tell me sixty pounds ?

MARKS: There's precious little market for this stuff just now, Adolf Richter. I might get——

[*He hesitates.*

ADOLF: Yes ?

MARKS: I might take a risk, and try to get a margin on seventy or maybe seventy-five——

ADOLF (*taking the vase*): I ask you, Herman, can you see me going into the market at sefenty-five ? Ach, no. I put it away.

[*He goes R.C.*

MARKS: No ! No ! Now, come here !

ADOLF (*turning*): Yes ?

MARKS (*thoughtfully*): I have just remembered, now. I have a client who is sometimes interested in things like this. Mind you, he doesn't know much about it. I might persuade him—(*he takes the vase*) let's see—I might get him to offer, say eighty-two or eighty-five——

ADOLF (*in gentle reproach*): Herman !

[*Pause. MARKS looks at him.*

I ask you as a business man to another—take up what you see at your elbow there.

MARKS (*picking up the magnifying-glass*): This ?

ADOLF: Yes. End look again, end then once more again at the bottom of thet piece off china, end tell me what it is you see.



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MARKS: Eh? (*He obeys. He then gives a soft whistle, and looks at ADOLF with an expression of mixed consternation and amusement.*) Oh. (*He chuckles.*) Oho, ho! ho! Now how did I come to let that escape me, eh?

ADOLF: Because you *wanted* it to escape you. Hey? You thought I did not know. But, Herman, there is no one who can't see so much as those who don't wish to be blinded, isn't it? (*He smiles broadly.*) Now, Herman, will you be sensible and make me an offer that is not an insult already?

MARKS: We-ell. Now, shall we say a hundred and twenty guineas?

ADOLF (*chuckling*): You said it. I didn't! (*He crosses C. to DIGBY.*) You see, Mr. Digby, at last Herman is beginning to talk like a man and not like a child, eh?

DIGBY (*amused*): D'you mean to tell me that bit of china's worth a hundred and twenty guineas?

ADOLF: No, it isn't. It's worth twice as much in the market, end ten times that to me—a sacred memory of my mother, which I must sell because I am worried. Twice as much as what he tells me is it worth!

DIGBY: Oh, nonsense! (*He laughs.*)

ADOLF (*shocked*): Did you hear him, Herman Marks? "Nonsense," he tells me, but *I* know, end *you* know, after all these years in our business, that two hundred and fifty guineas is a fair price for what he calls a "bit—of—china"—yes?

MARKS: You're right, Richter, but I can't afford to give it to you. A hundred and eighty pounds, my friend, that's the most I can offer.

ADOLF: Guineas, Herman.

MARKS: Pounds, Richter. Cash down. You know my methods.

ADOLF (*reproachfully*): Herman, your methods are robbery. A hundred and eighty. It—it would put me right, nearly. Make it guineas, Herman, end close the deal.

MARKS (*good-humouredly*): All right! I suppose we must give in, but I shall lose on this. (*He takes out his cheque-book.*) What'll my wife say, eh, when I tell her?

ADOLF: Naomi? She will say, "It was wicked of you, Herman, to be so hard on Adolf Richter after all these years!"

MARKS: Oho-ho! I like that! Look here—— (*He takes out his fountain-pen.*)

ADOLF: Wait! . . . Wait a moment! Still, I am not sure. (*Deliberately.*) No, Mr. Digby shall decide! He is to be Leah's husband, isn't it? Tell me, Mr. Digby, shall I sell my mother's memory for a hundred and eighty guineas and put my books in order?

MARKS (*amused*): Richter, don't be sentimental.

ADOLF: Stop, Herman. (*He is speaking quite quietly, and without giving DIGBY the least idea he is testing him.*) Well, Mr. Digby, what shall I do?

DIGBY (*embarrassed*): Well, it's hardly my business——

[*Enter LEAH C.*

(*Licking his lips*) D-don't sell it. Keep it.

ADOLF: But why?

[*LEAH is between ADOLF and DIGBY.*

DIGBY: Well, I mean, it was your mother's, wasn't it?

ADOLF: You hear that, Herman? I am afraid you cannot heff it.

MARKS: And I thought you were a business man.

ADOLF: Neffer mind, Herman. Perhaps I sell you something else? Now, listen——

MARKS: Not to-night, Adolf Richter! I've got to go.

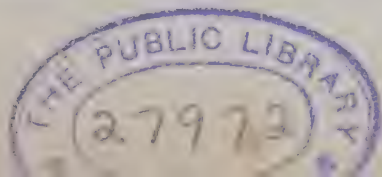
LEAH: But you'll stop and have something with us. Uncle Herman! and after what I've got ready for you, too! Oh! delicatessen, and Pilsener, and——

MARKS: No, no! Leah. I had no idea it was so late. I promised Naomi I give her a hand at bridge if the children are home. And Bernstein may be there. Another time.

LEAH: That's mean. I shan't ask you again.

MARKS: Oh, yes, you will.

ADOLF: Of course, next week! By then I find something to tempt you, eh?



MARKS: All right, we'll see. Good-bye, Mr. Digby. You've spoiled my evening, you know.

DIGBY: I'm sorry, but there it is. Good night.

MARKS: Good night. Good night, Leah. *Mahzel-tov.*

LEAH (*unconsciously*): *Mahzel-tov.*

[*She recollects herself, and gives a shy little laugh.*]

MARKS (*pressing her hand and repeating gently*): *Mahzel-tov.*

LEAH: Good night, Uncle Herman. Love to Aunt Naomi and Rosie and Lionel, too.

MARKS: Good night.

ADOLF: I see you down. Yes, of course, I want to tell you. (*As they go out*) Do you remember Bernard Levy, Herman, he was in the wholesale optical——

DIGBY (*as LEAH moves to the table*): Phew! Thank Heaven I'm marrying a what-is-it, a goy.

LEAH (*smiling faintly*): I'm only half a goy, you know.

DIGBY (*crossing C.*): The better half, believe me. (*He smiles.*) Love me?

LEAH (*rather restrained*): Of course.

[*DIGBY makes to kiss her.*]

No, not now. He'll be coming back. No, please, Clifford—no *please*. (*Kiss. She slowly pushes him away.*) I'm sorry—I didn't want him to——

DIGBY (*after a pause*): Getting pretty senile, isn't he? He nearly let that vase thing slip.

LEAH (*intentionally misunderstanding*): Yes, his hands are not so steady as they were.

DIGBY: Eh? Oh—quite. I say, is he really so hard up?

LEAH (*busy at the table*): I don't know. Does it matter? If he says he is, he is. (*Quietly*) We Jews are sometimes very truthful, you know.

DIGBY: *We*——! I say, don't be funny!

LEAH: Anyway, I never inquire about business matters. Unless I see he's really worried. (*She puts down the tray.*) You don't imagine you're marrying money, do you?

DIGBY (*disconcerted*): Me? I don't know that I've thought about it much.

LEAH: That's all right, then.

DIGBY: Leah! You do sound a bit off the mark. What's hit you?

LEAH: Nothing—— I don't know. Clifford, d'you mind not talking about—things—just now?

DIGBY (*kneeling on chair*): You don't seem a bit fond of me to-night. I believe I know what it is. It's this house—and these people. Your family. You're a different person away from them.

LEAH: Am I?

DIGBY (*urgently*): I love you, Leah. I love your beauty, and you—*yourself*. But I must have you in a setting of my own.

LEAH (*smiling*): This is my natural setting.

DIGBY: Is it? You wait! I've got ideas of my own about that, my dear. We must be married soon, Leah. Awfully soon. I want you to be—completely mine—away from all this.

LEAH (*thoughtfully*): Do you? (*She picks up the tray briskly.*) Well, do you mind if I get supper now?

[*She carries the tray over to L.C.*]

DIGBY (*a little nonplussed*): All right, you funny kid. (*He turns.*) Here! I'll have a spot more of that whisky if you don't mind.

[*He takes his glass from the tray, smiles at her and crosses back to the table to fill it.*]

LEAH: Help yourself.

[*He does so.*]

LEAH is playing this scene very quietly, without any obvious distaste towards DIGBY, but with a certain thoughtfulness. DIGBY displays a certain careless ardour combined with a shade of humorous cynicism. He helps himself generously, while LEAH standing L.C., with the tray, watches him quietly.

DIGBY (*raising his glass*): Skin off your nose! (*He drinks.*) Don't know any of your Yiddisher ones!



LEAH: I——

[*She checks what she was about to say, and goes up C. with the tray.*]

ADOLF *meets her in the doorway.*

ADOLF: Hey, Leah! All ready for supper, now?

LEAH (*almost brusquely*): I'll be back in a minute.

[*Exit LEAH.*]

ADOLF (*looking after her in some surprise*): Hey! Well! Well!  
(*He comes down.*) Herman Marks now, a nice fellow, eh?

DIGBY (*coolly*): He's all right. (*He turns to the fireplace, with the glass.*)

ADOLF (*regarding him with some amusement*): "All right?"  
Oi! He's a fine fellow, Herman Marks, ach! A goodt man!

[*Re-enter LEAH.*]

Hey, Leah, your yong man here chose well, yes! I am gled!  
Ach, yes, he chose well. He said I must not sell.

LEAH: Good. (*Briskly*) Supper's ready.

ADOLF: One moment, Leah! I heff something more to tell you. It is a good choke this. (*He picks up the vase.*) You will enchoy it—laugh, eh? Poor Herman! Listen! Furniture he knows. Pictures he knows. Silver he knows. But china! He is a child when he comes to china! A child!

DIGBY: What d'you mean?

ADOLF: This, my friend, was not my mother's! Leah, can you see me sell my mother's china, eh?

LEAH: No, but Grandfather——

DIGBY (*bursting out into laughter*): Then you were pulling his leg, eh?

ADOLF (*laughing as if he is really enjoying the joke*): Oi! But yes! I pull his leg! Heff I not told you? And it is worth—look, I show you what it is worth——

[*He crashes the vase to the floor where it breaks into pieces.*]

DIGBY: My God! You fool! We could have made a hund——

ADOLF (*with a great cry*): Ai! Yes! You say it! We could heff made it—a hondred and eighty guineas for a thing



wort ten shillinks, isn't it ? SO ! Thet is the man, Leah, who wants to merry you ! A man who thinks I am a fool to be honest !

DIGBY : But damn it, man——

ADOLF : He did not care for my mother's memory ! He wanted to keep two hundred pounds in the family because it comes to you when I heff gone ! He says I am a fool to break a piece of tresh worth nothing at all when I can sell it for a hondred endt eighty guineas to someone who doesn't understandt !

LEAH : Clifford !

DIGBY : Leah, don't be stupid !

ADOLF : Oi ! Oi ! Did you hear me, Leah ?

LEAH (*defiantly*) : And what if he did——

[*She breaks off quickly.*]

ADOLF : Wait ! Wait a moment ! Will you listen when I tell you something else already ? You see the pieces on the floor there ? Now I tell you it was a trick I play you ! It *was* my mother's vase ! It has cost me two hondred pounds—God of my fathers ! A chenuine piece ! To prove to Leah you are no good, a *schlemmil*, a bit of tresh I will not heff in my house !

LEAH : Grandfather !

ADOLF : Endt it was worth it ! Effery penny it was worth it to show you what he is—a crook, isn't it ?—no good to you, my Leah—neffer shell you merry such a man—I heff gifen the best thing of all my treasures to show you—what is it you will say to me, what is it you will say ?

[*Silence, except for the quiet sobbing of ADOLF.*]

LEAH (*quietly to DIGBY*) : Please go.

DIGBY : Leah—really—listen——

LEAH : No, please ! I don't want to hear anything. I see something now that has been puzzling me. I don't want you any more.

DIGBY : You mean that ?

LEAH (*with unconscious dignity, in a low voice*) : Have I to tell you twice ?

DIGBY (*in cold fury*): Right.

[*He hesitates, then goes off C. and slams the door.*

*A pause. Door-slam off.* ADOLF goes slowly to the fireplace and stands with his back to LEAH.

ADOLF: Leah, go end heff your supper, lieb'kind.

LEAH: No, not now. I will fetch yours in here.

ADOLF: No, no. I will fetch it myself. First some letters I must finish. (*He goes to her.*) You are not angry?

LEAH (*smiling a little*): Only with myself, for not seeing.

ADOLF: Then go to bed, my Leah. Go end heff, if you like it, a good cry like a wise woman. Try to forgive the old man who tried to teach you—ai ! it has been a most expensive lesson, Leah ! Neffer mind. Did I not say "Honour is greater than faiths" ? If he hed been good enough for my Leah, I would heff said so, end I would heff blessed you both. But it was not so, that is all. One day you will be heppier, isn't it ?

LEAH: Perhaps. Good night, Grandfather.

[*She kisses him.*

ADOLF: Good night, my Leah.

[*She goes up C.*

*Shalom aleichem.* (*Turning up stage*) May the God of our fathers bless you end gif you peace.

LEAH (*smiling*): *Shalom.*

[*She goes out smiling at him. ADOLF stands a moment. Then surveys the broken vase ruefully. His face is grave, and then, quite suddenly, he smiles. He goes to the door C., looks out, closes it softly, and goes to the window R., which he opens. He signals out to someone with his hand.*

ADOLF (*in a stage whisper*): Herman ! Yes, it is all right, now. The shop door is open.

[*He closes the window, and goes C. to pick up the pieces of broken china.*

MARKS enters after a moment or two.

(*Turning*) Sh ! now ! Close the door quiet, Herman.

MARKS (*having done so, comes down*): Here, let me do that.

[*He picks up the remaining pieces, and they both stand facing each other, with a comical expression.*]

Well, Adolf Richter?

ADOLF: Well, Herman? You saw him go?

MARKS: I sat in my car and watched.

ADOLF: Everything happened just as we planned it. End Leah knows now the truth.

MARKS (*significantly*): Does she know about his reputation in Great Portland Street?

ADOLF: No. The vase was enough. Here, give me those. (*He takes the pieces.*) But come and sit down, do not make a noise. Leah has only just gone up. (*He opens the cupboard R.*) We must fetch a glass of wine, Herman.

MARKS (*as ADOLF takes out the bottle*): Hey! That is fine stuff you are giving me, Richter!

ADOLF: Do I fetch trash in my house? Always the best—

MARKS (*suddenly*): Richter!

ADOLF (*pouring the wine*): Yes?

MARKS: Have you the—the other one—quite safe?

ADOLF: Safe? Did you hear him? Safe, he asks it! (*He goes R.*) But I show you, Herman Marks, if it is safe or not—

MARKS (*as ADOLF brings out the genuine vase*): Hey! It is beautiful—

ADOLF: The genuine one! My mother's vase already! Oh! Leah one day will forgive me that I deceive her, and the God of my fathers will forgive it, too!

MARKS (*as they examine it together*): Himmel, it is perfect, Adolf—the genuine piece—

ADOLF: The lustre—

MARKS: The colours—

ADOLF: The surface of it, Herman—

MARKS: What a marvellous— Richter! Listen, now, I will give you—

ADOLF (*in mock fury*): Did you hear him? He tinks I will sell my mother's—— (*Suddenly*) Herman!

MARKS: Yes?

ADOLF: I tell you what you *shell* gif me—one of your own cigars, Herman! Endt we shell heff a glass of wine!

[*They both laugh as HERMAN brings out his cigar-case. ADOLF hands him wine. They raise their glasses.*]

*Mahzel-tov*, Herman——

MARKS: *Mahzel-tov!*

[*They drink and laugh and laugh ad lib. until—*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

Harold Chapin

THE PHILOSOPHER OF  
BUTTERBIGGINS

*A Play*



## CHARACTERS

DAVID PIRNIE

LIZZIE – his daughter

JOHN BELL – his son-in-law

ALEXANDER – John's little son

*This play was performed for the first time on December 14th, 1915, at THE HAROLD CHAPIN MEMORIAL PERFORMANCE, with the following cast:*

<i>David</i>	—	—	—	MR. CAMPBELL GULLAN
<i>Lizzie</i>	—	—	—	MISS HILDA TREVELYAN
<i>John</i>	—	—	—	MR. ALLAN JEAVES
<i>Wee Alexander</i>	—	—	—	MASTER HAROLD VALETTA CHAPIN

*Afterwards by THE STAGE SOCIETY, on December 17th, 1917, with the following cast:*

<i>David</i>	—	—	—	MR. CAMPBELL GULLAN
<i>Lizzie</i>	—	—	—	MISS NORAH BALFOUR
<i>John</i>	—	—	—	MR. GEORGE HOWARD
<i>Wee Alexander</i>	—	—	—	MASTER HAROLD VALETTA CHAPIN

JOHN BELL's house in the tenement at Butterbiggins consists of the very usual "two rooms, kitchen and bath," a concealed bed in the parlour and another in the kitchen enabling him to house his family—consisting of himself, his wife, his little son, and his aged father-in-law—therein. The kitchen and living-room is a good-sized square room. The right wall (our R. as we look at it) is occupied by a huge built-in dresser, sink, and coal-bunker; the L. wall by a high-mantelled, ovened and boilered fire-place, the recess on either side of which contains a low, painted cupboard. Over the far cupboard hangs a picture of a ship, but over the near one is a small, square window. The far wall has two large doors in it, that on the right leading to the lobby, and that on the left appertaining to the old father-in-law's concealed bed.

The walls are distempered a brickish red. The ceiling once was white. The floor is covered with bright linoleum and a couple of rag rugs—one before the fire—a large one—and one smaller one before the door of the concealed bed.

A deal table is just to R. of Centre, a long flexible gas-bracket depending from the ceiling above it. Another many-jointed gas-bracket projects from the middle of the high mantelpiece, its flame turned down towards the stove. There are wooden chairs at the table, above, below, and to L. of it—the latter chair being in the centre. A high-backed easy-chair is above the fire, a kitchen elbow-chair below it.

The kitchen is very tidy. A newspaper newly fallen to the rug before the fire and another—an evening one—spread flat on the table are (besides a child's mug and plate also on the table) the only things not stowed in their prescribed places. It is evening—the light beyond the little square window being the grey dimness of a long Northern twilight which slowly deepens during the play. When the curtain rises it is still light enough in the room for a

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All applications for permission to perform this play must be made to Messrs. Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2; or, for South Africa, to Messrs. Samuel French, Ltd., P.O. Box 497, Nairobi; or, for Canada, to Messrs. Samuel French (Canada), Ltd., 480 University Avenue, Toronto; or, for the U.S.A., to Messrs. Samuel French, Inc., 25 West 45th Street, New York City, or 811 West 7th Street, Los Angeles.

The play is published by Messrs. Gowans and Gray, at 1s. net, and may be obtained from Messrs. Samuel French.

*man to read if the print be not too faint and his eyes good. The warm light of the fire leaps and flickers through the grey, showing up with exceptional clearness the deep-lined face of old DAVID PIRNIE, who is discovered half-risen from his arm-chair above the fire standing on the hearth-rug, his body bent and his hand on the chair-arm. He is a little, feeble old man with a well-shaped head and weather-beaten face set off by a grizzled beard and whiskers wiry and vigorous in curious contrast to the wreath of snowy hair that circles his head. His upper lip is shaven. He wears an old suit—the waistcoat of which being unbuttoned shows an old flannel shirt. His slippers are low at the heel and his socks loose at the ankles.*

*The old man's eyes are fixed appealingly on those of his daughter, who stands in the half-open door, her grasp on the handle, meeting his look squarely—a straight-browed, black-haired, determined young woman of six- or seven-and-twenty. Her husband, JOHN, seated at the table in his shirt-sleeves with his head in his hands, reads hard at the paper and tries to look unconcerned.*

DAVID: Aw—but Lizzie !

LIZZIE (*with splendid firmness*): It's nae use, faither. I'm no' gaein' to gie in to the wean. Ye've been tellin' yer stories to him nicht after nicht for dear knows how long and he's gettin' to expect them.

DAVID: Why should he no' expect them ?

LIZZIE: It disna do for weans to count on things so. He's layin' up a sad disappointment for himself yin o' these days.

DAVID: He's gettin' a sad disappointment the noo. Och, come on, Lizzie ! I'm no' gaein' to die just yet, an' ye can break him off gradually when I begin to look like it.

LIZZIE: Wha's talkin' of yer diein', faither ?

DAVID: Ye were speakin' o' the disappointment he was layin' up for himself if he got to count on me.

LIZZIE: I wasna thinkin' o' yer diein', faither—only—it's no' guid for a bairn——

DAVID: Where's the harm in my giein' him a bit story before he gangs tae his bed ?

LIZZIE: I'm no' sayin' ther's ony harm in it this yinst, faither; but it's no' richt to gae on nicht after nicht wi' never a break——

DAVID: Whit wey is it no' richt if there's nae harm in it?

LIZZIE: It's giein' in to the wean.

DAVID: Whit wey should ye no' gie in to him if there's nae harm in it?

LIZZIE (*keeping her patience with difficulty*): Because it gets him into the habit.

DAVID: But why should he no' get into the habit if there's nae harm in it?

[JOHN, *at the table, chuckles. LIZZIE gives him a look, but he meets it not.*

LIZZIE: Really, faither, ye micht be a wean yerself, ye're that persistent.

DAVID: No. Lizzie, I'm no' persistent. I'm reasoning wi' ye. Ye said there was nae harm in my telling him a wee bit story, an' now ye say I'm not to because it'll get him into the habit, an' what I'm asking ye is, where's the harm o' his gettin' into the habit if there's nae harm in it?

LIZZIE: Oh, aye; ye can be gey clever, twisting the words in my mouth, faither; but richt's richt, and wrang's wrang for a' yer cleverness.

DAVID (*earnestly*): I'm no' bein' clever ava', Lizzie—no' the noo—I'm just trying to make ye see that if ye admit there's nae harm in a thing ye canna say there's ony harm in it an'—— (*Pathetically*) I'm wantin' to tell wee Alexander a bit story before he gangs to his bed.

JOHN (*aside to her*): Och, wumman——

LIZZIE: T'ts, John, ye'd gie in tae onybody if they were just persistent enough.

JOHN: He's an auld man.

LIZZIE (*really exasperated*): I ken fine he's an auld man, John, and ye're a young yin', an' Alexander's gaein' to be anither, an' I'm a lone wumman among the lot o' ye, but I'm no' gaein' to gie in to——



JOHN (*bringing a fresh mind to bear upon the argument*): Efter a', Lizzie, there's nae harm——

LIZZIE (*almost with a scream of anger*): Och, now you've stairted, have you? Harm! Harm! Harm! You're talking about *harm* and I'm talking about richt and wrang. You'd see your son grow up a drunken keelie an' mebbe a thief an' a murderer so long as you could say there was nae harm in it.

JOHN (*expostulating with some cause*): But I couldna say there was nae harm in that, Lizzie, an' I wudna. Only when there's nae harm——

LIZZIE: Och!! (*Exit, calling off to the cause of the trouble*) Are ye in yer bed yet, Alexander?

[*Shuts door with a click.*]

DAVID (*standing on hearth-rug and shaking his head more in sorrow than in anger*): She's no' reasonable, ye ken, John, she disna argue fair. I'm no' complainin' o' her mither, but it's a wee bit hard that the only twa women I've known well enough to be really chatty an' argumentative with, should have been just like that. An' me that fond o' women's society!

[*He lowers himself into his chair.*]

JOHN: They're all like it.

DAVID (*judiciously*): I wudna go sae far as to say that, John. Ye see, I've only kent they twa to study carefully—an' it's no' fair to judge the whole sex by just the twa examples as it were (*running on*)—but it's gey hard, an' I was wantin' to tell wee Alexander a special fine story the nicht. (*Removes glasses and blinks his eyes.*) Aweel!

JOHN (*comforting*): Mebbe the morn——

DAVID: If it's no' richt the nicht, it'll no' be richt the morn's nicht.

JOHN: Ye canna say that, faither. It wasna wrang last nicht.

DAVID (*bitterly*): Mebbe it was, an' Lizzie hadna foun' it out.



JOHN: Aw noo, faither, dinna get saurcastic !

DAVID (*between anger and tears weakly*): I canna help it. I'm black affronted. I was wantin' to tell wee Alexander a special fine story the nicht, an' now here's Lizzie wi her richt's richt an' wrang's wrang. Och ! there's nae reason in the women !

JOHN: We hae to gie in to them, though.

DAVID: Aye ! That's why.

[*There is a pause. The old man picks up his paper again and settles his glasses on his nose. JOHN rises, and, with a spill from the mantelpiece, lights the gas there, which he then bends to throw the light to the old man's advantage.*]

DAVID: Thank ye, John. Do ye hear him ?

JOHN (*erect on hearth-rug*): Who ?

DAVID: Wee Alexander.

JOHN: No.

DAVID: Greetin' his heart out.

JOHN: Och, he's no' greetin'. Lizzie's wi' him.

DAVID: I ken fine Lizzie's wi' him, but he's greetin' for a' that. He was wantin' to hear yon story o' the kelpies up at Crosshill wi' the tram—— (*Breaking his mood impatiently*) Och !

JOHN (*crossing to table and lighting up there*): It's gettin' dark gey early. We'll shin be haein' tea by the gas.

DAVID (*rustling his paper*): Aye—— (*Suddenly*) There never was a female philosopher, ye ken, John.

JOHN: Was there no' ?

DAVID: No. (*Angrily, in a gust*) An' there never will be ! (*Then more calmly*) An' yet there's an awful lot o' philosophy about women, John.

JOHN: Aye ?

DAVID: Oh, aye. They're that unreasonable, an' yet ye canna reason them down, an' they're that weak, an' yet ye canna make them gie in to ye. Of course ye'll say ye canna reason doon a stane or make a clod o' earth gie in tae ye.

JOHN: Will I?

DAVID: Aye. An' ye'll be richt. But then I'll tell ye a stane willna answer ye back, an' a clod o' earth willna try to withstand ye, so how can ye argue them down?

JOHN (*convinced*): Ye canna.

DAVID: Richt! Ye canna! But a wumman *will* answer ye back, an' she *will* stand against ye, an' *yet* ye canna argue her down, though ye have strength an' reason on your side, an' she's talkin' naething but blethers about richt's richt and wrang's wrang, an' sending a poor bairn off t' his bed i' the yin room, an' leavin' her auld faither all alone by the fire in the ither, an'—ye ken—Philosophy—(*He ceases to speak and wipes his glasses again.*)

[JOHN, *intensely troubled*, tiptoes up to the door and opens it a foot. The wails of ALEXANDER can be heard muffled by a further door. JOHN calls off.

JOHN: Lizzie.

[LIZZIE *immediately comes into sight outside the door with a* "Shsh."

JOHN: Yer faither's greetin'!

LIZZIE (*with a touch of exasperation*): Och, I'm no heedin'. There's anither wean in there greetin' too, an' I'm no heedin' him neither, and he's greetin' twicet as loud as the auld yin.

JOHN (*shocked*): Ye're heartless, wumman.

LIZZIE (*with patience*): No, I'm no' heartless, John, but there's too much heart in this family an' somebody's got to use their heid.

[DAVID *cranes round the side of his chair to catch what they are saying. She stops and comes to him kindly, but with womanly firmness.*

LIZZIE: I'm vexed ye should be disappointed, faither, but ye see, don't ye——

[*A singularly piercing wail from ALEXANDER goes up. LIZZIE rushes to silence him.*

LIZZIE: Mercy ! The neighbours will think we're murderin' him.

[*The door closes behind her.*]

DAVID (*nodding for a space as he revolves the woman's attitude*): Ye hear that, John ?

JOHN: Whit ?

DAVID (*with quiet irony*): She's vexed I should be disappointed. The wumman thinks she's richt ! Wummen ay think they're richt—mebbe it's that that mak's them that obstinate. (*With a ghost of a twinkle*) She's feart o' the neighbours, though.

JOHN (*stolidly*): A' women are feart o' the neighbours.

DAVID (*reverting*): Puir wee man. I tellt ye he was greetin', John. He's fine an' disappointed. (*Pondering*) D'ye ken what I'm thinkin', John ?

JOHN: Whit ?

DAVID: I'm thinkin' he's ower young to get his ain wey, an' I'm ower auld, an' it's a fine thocht !

JOHN: Aye ?

DAVID: Aye. I never thocht of it before, but that's what it is. He's no' come to it yet, an' I'm past it. (*Suddenly*) What's the most important thing in life, John ?

[*JOHN opens his mouth and shuts it again unused.*]

DAVID: Ye ken perfectly well. Wha is it ye're wantin' a' the time ?

JOHN: Different things.

DAVID (*satisfied*): Aye—different things ! But ye want them a', do ye no' ?

JOHN: Aye.

DAVID: If ye had yer ain wey ye'd hae them, eh ?

JOHN: I wud that.

DAVID (*triumphant*): Then is that no' what ye want: yer ain wey ?

JOHN (*enlightened*): Losh !

DAVID (*warming to it*): That's what life is, John—gettin' yer ain wey. First ye're born an' ye canna dae anything but cry, but God's given yer mither ears an' ye get yer wey by just cryin' for it. (*Hastily anticipating criticism*) I ken that's no' exactly in keeping wi' what I've been sayin' about Alexander—but a newborn bairnie's an awfu' delicate thing, an' the Lord gets it past its infancy by a dispensation o' providence very unsettling to oor poor human understandings. Ye'll notice the weans cease their wey by juist greetin' for it as shin as they're auld enough to seek it itherwise.

JOHN: The habit hangs onto them, whiles.

DAVID (*with a twinkle*): It does that. An' mebbe if God's given yer neighbours ears an' ye live close by ye'll get yer wey by a dispensation o' providence a while longer. But there's things ye'll hae to do for yourself gin ye want to—an' ye will—ye'll want to hold up yer hand, an' ye *will* hold out yer hand, an' ye'll want to stand up an' walk, an' ye'll want to dae as ye please, an' ye *will* dae as ye please, an' then ye are practised an' learnt in the art of getting yer ain wey—an' ye're a man !

JOHN: Man, faither, ye're wonderful !

DAVID (*complacently*): I'm a philosopher, John. But it goes on mebbe.

JOHN: Aye ?

DAVID: Aye, mebbe ye think ye'd like to make ither folk mind ye an' yer wey an' ye try, an' if it comes off ye're a big man an' mebbe the master o' a vessel wi' three men and a boy under ye as I was, John. (*Dropping into the minor*) An' then ye come doon hill.

JOHN (*apprehensively*): Doon the hill ?

DAVID: Aye—doon to mebbe wantin' to tell a wean a bit story before he gangs tae his bed, an' ye canna dae even that. An' then a while more an' ye want to get to yer feet an' ye canna, an' a while more an' ye want to lift up yer hand an' ye canna . . . an' in a while more ye're just forgotten an' done wi'.

JOHN: Aw, faither !



DAVID: Dinna look sae troubled, John. I'm no' afraid to die when my time comes. It's these hints that I'm done wi' before I'm dead that I dinna like.

JOHN: Whatna hints?

DAVID: Well—Lizzie an' her richt's richt an' wrang's wrang when I think o' telling wee Alexander a wee bit story before he gangs tae his bed.

JOHN (*gently*): Ye are a wee thing persistent, faither.

DAVID: No, I'm no' persistent, John. I've gied in. I'm a philosopher, John, an' a philosopher kens when he's done wi'.

JOHN: Aw, faither.

DAVID (*getting lower and lower*): It's gey interesting, philosophy, John, an' the only philosophy worth thinkin' about is the philosophy of growin' auld—because that's what we're a' doing, a' living things. There's nae philosophy in a stane, John, he's juist a stane, an' in a hun'ed years he'll be juist a stane still—unless he's broken up, an' then he'll be juist not a stane but he'll no' ken what's happened to him because he didn't break up gradual an' first lose his boat an' then his hoose an' then hae his wee grandson taken away when he was for tellin' him a bit story before he gangs tae his bed. . . . It's yon losing yer grip bit by bit an' kennin' that ye're losing it that makes a philosopher, John.

JOHN: If I kent what ye meant by philosophy, faither, I'd be better able to follow ye.

[LIZZIE *enters quietly and closes door after her.*

JOHN: Is he asleep?

LIZZIE: No, he's no' asleep, but I've shut both doors, an' the neighbours canna hear him.

JOHN: Aw, Lizzie—

LIZZIE (*sharply*): John—

DAVID: Whit was I tellin' ye, John, about weans gettin' their ain wey if the neighbours had ears an' they lived close? Was I no' richt?



LIZZIE (*answering for JOHN with some acerbity*): Aye, ye were richt, faither, nae doot, but we dinna live that close here, an' the neighbours canna hear him at the back o' the hoose.

DAVID: Mebbe that's why ye changed Alexander into the parlour an' gied me the bed in here when it began to get cauld.

LIZZIE (*hurt*): Aw no, faither, I brought ye in here to be warmer.

DAVID (*placably*): I believe ye, wumman—(*With a faint twinkle again*) but it's turned oot luckily, has it no'?

[DAVID waits for a reply but gets none. LIZZIE fetches needle-work from dresser drawer and sits above table. DAVID's face and voice take on a more thoughtful tone.]

DAVID (*musng*): Puir wee man. If he was in here you'd no' be letting him greet his heart oot where onybody could hear him. Wud ye?

LIZZIE (*calmly*): Mebbe I'd no'.

JOHN: Ye ken fine ye'd no', wumman.

LIZZIE: John, thread my needle, and dinna take faither's part against me.

JOHN (*surprised*): I'm no'.

LIZZIE: No, I ken you're no' meaning to, but you men are that thrang—

[She is interrupted by a loud squall from DAVID, which he maintains, eyes shut, chair-arms gripped, and mouth open, for nearly half a minute before he cuts it off abruptly and looks at the startled couple at the table.]

LIZZIE: Mercy, faither, whit's wrang wi' ye?

DAVID (*collectedly*): There's naething wrang wi' me, Lizzie, except that I'm wantin' to tell wee Alexander a bit story—

LIZZIE (*firmlly, but very kindly*): But ye're no' goin' to—

[She breaks off in alarm as her father opens his mouth preparatory to another yell which, however, he postpones to speak to JOHN.]

DAVID: Ye mind whit I was saying about the dispensation o' providence to help weans till they could try for their-selves, John?

JOHN: Aye.

DAVID: Did it no' occur to ye, then, that there ought to be some sort of dispensation to look after the auld yins who were past it?

JOHN: No.

DAVID: Aweel—it didna occur to me at the time——

*[And he lets off another prolonged wail.]*

LIZZIE (*going to him*): Faither! The neighbours'll hear ye!!

DAVID (*desisting as before*): I ken it fine. I'm no' at the back of the hoose.

*[Shorter wail.]*

LIZZIE (*almost in tears*): They'll be coming to ask.

DAVID: Let them. They'll no' ask *me*.

*[Squall.]*

LIZZIE: Faither—ye're no' behaving well. John——

JOHN: Aye?

LIZZIE (*helplessly*): Naething—— Faither, stop it. They'll think ye clean daft.

DAVID (*ceasing to howl and speaking with gravity*): I ken it fine, Lizzie; an' it's no' easy for a man who has been respeckit an' lookit up to a' his life to be thought daft at eighty-three, but the most important thing in life is to get yer ain wey.

*[Resumes wailing.]*

LIZZIE (*puzzled, to JOHN*): Whit's that?

JOHN: It's his philosophy that he was talking about.

DAVID (*firmly*): An' I'm gaein' to tell wee Alexander yon story tho' they think me daft for it.

LIZZIE: But it's no' for his ain guid, faither. I've tellt ye so, but ye wudna listen.

DAVID: *I wudna listen, wumman ! It was you wudna listen to me when I axed ye whit harm—(Checking himself)* No ! I'm no' gaein' to hae that ower again. I've gien up arguin' wi' women. I'm juist gaein' tae greet loud an' sair till wee Alexander's brought in here to hae his bit story, an' if the neighbours——

*[Loud squall.*

LIZZIE (*aside, to JOHN*): He's fair daft !

JOHN (*aghast*): Ye'd no' send him to——

LIZZIE (*reproachfully*): John !

*[A louder squall from the old man.*

LIZZIE (*beseechingly*): Oh, faither——

*[A still louder one.*

LIZZIE (*beating her hands together distractedly*): He'll be—Will—he'll—Och !!! (*Resigned and beaten*) John, go and bring wee Alexander in here.

*[JOHN is off like a shot. The opening of the door of the other room can be told by the burst of ALEXANDER's voice. The old man's wails have stopped the second his daughter capitulated. JOHN returns with ALEXANDER and bears him to his grandfather's waiting knee. The boy's tears and howls have ceased and he is smiling triumphantly. He is, of course, in his night-shirt and a blanket, which Grandpa wraps round him, turning towards the fire.*

LIZZIE (*looking on with many nods of the head and smacks of the lips*): There you are ! That's the kind o' boy he is. Greet his heart oot for a thing an' stop the moment he gets it.

DAVID: Dae ye expect him to gae on after he's got it ? Ah, but Alexander, ye didna get it yer lane this time, it took the twa o' us. An' hard work it was for the Auld Yin ! Man, (*playing hoarse*) I doot if I've enough voice left for a—— (*Bursting out very loud and making the boy laugh*) Aweel ! Whit's it gaein' to be—eh ?

CURTAIN

James Lansdale Hodson

NELSON IN ARLINGTON STREET

*A Play*

## CHARACTERS

NELSON

FANNY — Nelson's wife

REV. EDMUND NELSON

SIR WILLIAM HAMILTON

EMMA HAMILTON

AUTHOR'S NOTE.—At the period of this play, Nelson has recently returned from Naples, travelling overland across Europe in company with Sir William and Lady Hamilton. It is the first time he has been in London since his victory at the Nile. With the crowds he is immensely popular; with those in high circles less so, for his liaison with Lady Hamilton is well-known and the subject of criticism. The King has shown his displeasure.

Nelson himself has so far been singularly lacking in decision in his domestic relations. He has told his wife Fanny nothing, has found the return to her unpalatable, is irritated by a situation which is extremely thorny, and is, generally speaking, in a temperamental state.

But it must be said that his position was difficult; he found himself the nation's hero, in love with a woman who was wife to His Majesty's former Ambassador—an old man who could not be expected to live much longer, who had been kind to him, and for whom he entertained a warm regard, which was reciprocated. Moreover, divorce was only possible by special Act of Parliament.

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SCENE: *At NELSON's lodgings in Arlington Street, London. A large sombre room on the first floor, overlooking the street. There is a window left; doors back and right, the latter leading to another and smaller room, also used by Nelson.*

*It is the late afternoon of an autumn day in 1800. Rain drums against the window in the early part of the play.*

*When the curtain rises, NELSON is disclosed, with his father and FANNY.*

NELSON *is forty-two years old, but looks older—his face lined and thin, his hair turning grey. He is in uniform.*

*His father, THE REV. EDMUND NELSON, Rector of Burnham Thorpe in Norfolk, is an old man nearly eighty—fragile, and nervous.*

FANNY, *Nelson's wife, is about his own age—rather prim and humourless, very conscious of the wrongs done to her, but not without dignity.*

RECTOR (*somewhat tremulously, and holding a sword tenderly in his hands*): Honour heaped upon honour! Never was a father so blessed. I think this sword the City gave you at the Guildhall is the most beautiful of them all . . . this crocodile on the hilt . . . beautiful. And this medal, too. . . (*Takes up a medal and reads*) "Hail, virtuous hero! Thy victories we acknowledge and thy God!" I think that is perfectly phrased, don't you, Fanny? (*turning to her*).

FANNY (*with a touch of irony*): Charming.

NELSON: Oh, let me see: I promised Mrs. Damer that old coat. She's doing a bust, you know, for the Guildhall. She's to have the coat I wore at the Nile, my dear.

FANNY: I'll have it cleaned.

NELSON (*irritably*): No, no, no! The whole point is that it

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mustn't be cleaned. I have carefully preserved it. The streaks of perspiration and hair powder are on it still for all to see—the evidence of my exertions to win the approbation of my country. So it must remain.

FANNY: I beg your pardon. (*Pause. Drily*) We sent your clothes to the laundry. Is that all right?

NELSON: It is no joke, madam. You forget I was nearly killed at the Nile.

FANNY: No, Horace, I do not forget. I think I nearly died also. I had had no word for weeks.

NELSON (*testily*): There's no post in the middle of the Mediterranean, madam. I'm not a miracle-worker.

RECTOR: Come, come, my children. Through you, my son, God has achieved something very near to a miracle, as is testified by the presence of the Duke of York and Mr. Pitt at the East India Company's dinner to you last night. I am the happiest and proudest man in England—after you, my dear son. When I think of those days, a few years ago, when you would have been glad to command a cockle-boat——

NELSON: I don't feel much different.

RECTOR: But, my son——

NELSON: When the roar of the battle has died down I am nobody——

RECTOR: Nobody? With your carriage drawn by the populace up Ludgate Hill, and crowds following you everywhere?

NELSON: Yes, yes, to look at the strange little man with one arm who has difficulty in dressing himself, and has to have his cravat tied for him, and his meat cut up by another. It ill suits me. And these people surrounding the Court—— I wish to heaven I were back in Naples.

FANNY: How can you say so when you have been here only a few days?

NELSON (*doggedly*): It is true, madam. (*In an outburst*) The King turned his back on me.

FANNY (*wiping her eyes*): London isn't lacking in gossips and backstairs informers.

NELSON: I don't understand you.

FANNY: When Lady Hamilton fainted at Drury Lane, it wasn't I alone who learned—the truth.

RECTOR: Fanny, what are you saying?

*[She doesn't answer, and as she dabs her eyes and nose, THE RECTOR turns from her to NELSON and back again, not knowing what to say or do.]*

RECTOR (*with gentle dignity*): I had hoped there would be peace between you now that you are united once again—that all the strain and uneasiness would be over. I have prayed for that. I beseech you, my son—and you, too, Fanny—bear with one another. You were happy together when you had less reason to be than now. Your country has honoured you (*turning to NELSON*). You bear a high name, exalted here in England, well respected abroad. This honour brings high responsibilities. Those ennobled by God or King or Nature cannot behave as lesser men—or should not. And (*turning to FANNY*), my dear, be patient if you can. Honours, wounds, a long separation. I seem to be preaching. I suppose it is my work and all I can do, and yet I am sorry to do it. (*Pause.*) I am an old man now. (*He stops.*) God keep and help you both.

*[NELSON, who has turned away, now swings round. He is seen to be furious. He speaks curtly, almost harshly.]*

NELSON: Have you finished, father?

*[THE RECTOR looks at him and sees it is hopeless. Shaking his head sorrowfully, he turns to the door. But he pauses again and says:]*

RECTOR: I do beseech you to ask God for His guidance.

*[THE RECTOR goes.]*

NELSON (*fuming*): By God! this is insupportable.

FANNY: The truth?

NELSON: Be careful, madam, how you torment me.

FANNY: I don't wish to torment you. I wish only to know the truth and where I stand. You have behaved more like a stranger than my husband since you came home. Why is it?

NELSON (*half turned away, and in a low voice*): You would not wish me to act against my inclination?

FANNY (*who is deeply moved*): Why did you marry me?

NELSON: Because I thought I loved you, and because I had profound respect for you.

FANNY: And now?

[NELSON *makes no answer.*

You have ruined my life.

NELSON: I have made you famous. You are Lady Nelson (*Pause.*) You expect too much. All women expect too much. (*Reasoning with her, and not seeing how much it hurts*) It would have suited me excellently well if I could have remained in love with you—it would have saved me a good deal of worry and distress.

FANNY (*tormenting herself*): What of the ecstasy you have had?

[NELSON *does not answer.*

You are heartless.

NELSON (*in an injured tone*): I don't think there is anybody else in the world who would charge me with that. There is none in whose eyes I stand so low as in yours.

FANNY (*ruefully*): Perhaps none knows you so well. You find it easy to be heroic at the Nile. Not so easy in London.

NELSON (*musingly*): You see one side of me. I have told you before I am not much use except on the deck of a ship. I sometimes think every man should be away from women for six months in the year.

FANNY: You talk so differently now. You are hard and brutal and cynical. Don't you—don't you love even her?

NELSON: Don't make it worse for both of us. If I told you she inspires my every action and thought, would you like that better? And yet, I wonder, too, if my duty is not enough inspiration?

FANNY: You talk much of your duty to your country. What of your duty to me?

NELSON: I have never questioned that. If ever we should decide to live apart, you will have half my income.



FANNY (*almost in tears*): I don't mean that kind of duty. I want companionship—affection—loyalty.

NELSON (*sadly*): You want more than it is in my power to give you. What is the use of our being much together? We find each other tiresome—we bicker. It is all very distasteful.

FANNY: You will not allow yourself to be happy. You resent my forcing this discussion on you. Did you really imagine we could go on as if nothing had happened when I know all the time she is your mistress? Would you never have told me?

NELSON: I knew it had to come. I—wanted to spare you——

FANNY: Spare me? You ignore and humiliate me. Oh! (*She breaks into weeping.*) I can't bear it.

NELSON (*genuinely distressed*): Fanny, Fanny—control yourself!

FANNY: How easy it is for you to talk! You have your comfort in her. What does it matter to you how I suffer? You are no better than a common seaman who finds a new woman. . . .

NELSON (*furious*): Hold your tongue, madam!

FANNY: Oh, how thankful you are for an excuse to be angry with me, and shout at me! You feel you are justified in your dislike of me. Oh, God! I know I say all the wrong things and behave in the wrong way. But you humiliate me so that I am half-demented. All these weary months I have waited in suspense, and your letters have come so rarely, and when they came they were so empty—"My dear Fanny, I hope you are well. The weather is fine here"—and all the time you were pouring out your heart to her. Oh, God! oh, God!

[*She bursts out weeping afresh. NELSON walks to and fro and stands occasionally looking at her, not knowing what to do, and offended by this display.*

FANNY (*lifting up her tear-stained face*): Can't we start afresh?

NELSON: I'm sorry, I—— It's no use.

FANNY (*with a flash of intuition*): It is true, then, that she is going to give you a child?

[NELSON nods silently.]



FANNY (*musingly*): You always wanted a son. (*She dries her eyes.*) I see. . . . (*Pause.*) I failed you.

NELSON: No, no. It isn't that. I don't want to justify myself that way. After all (*with a wry smile*), who knows that it will be a son?

FANNY: What will Sir William do?

NELSON (*in a low voice*): I don't know.

FANNY: Does he know the truth? He treats you as a friend—almost as his son.

NELSON (*half angry again*): You must see that I cannot discuss this with you.

FANNY (*with dignity*): I see that I cannot remain in this house as your wife when I am not.

[NELSON *paces to and fro for a moment.*]

NELSON: I want to do what will make you happiest.

FANNY (*in a stifled voice*): Happiest!

NELSON: Or least unhappy. I am very sorry, Fanny. You must believe that.

FANNY (*with a touch of irony again*): It doesn't matter whether I believe it or not, does it? You will be glad when I have gone.

NELSON: I would rather you remained here, but——

FANNY: How can I? Every time you go out, I shall know it is only to see her. I shall be in anguish and jealous torment. I had rather be away altogether. I shall suffer less.

NELSON: Where will you go?

FANNY: I don't know.

NELSON: Better stay here with my father. You are very dear to him. (*He is aware of no irony there, or hurt inflicted.*) I will go away.

FANNY (*quickly and intuitively*): You have planned it already?

NELSON (*doggedly*): I have been invited by Beckford to spend Christmas at Fonthill Abbey.

FANNY: And I—am I invited?

[NELSON *does not answer.*]

FANNY: But *she* is !

[NELSON *does not answer.*

FANNY (*rising, outraged*): It is enough. I will not bear it. You are humiliating me. I warn you, Horace, no good will come of it. You will not prosper while you behave so.

[NELSON *is at the mantelpiece, his back to her, drumming his fingers on the marble, as she goes.*

FANNY (*turning at the door*): I hope you may suffer as I am suffering.

[*But he doesn't move.* FANNY *goes out, her head high. He turns; his face is strained and tormented. His father enters again, nervous and excited.*

RECTOR: Horace, my son . . .

NELSON: Yes, father ?

RECTOR: Sir William Hamilton is here, and——

NELSON (*with a gesture of annoyance*): Does he want to see me ?

RECTOR (*fluttering*): No—not altogether. I gather it is I myself he wishes to see. I can't imagine why. (*Looks round.*) And these lodgings are most inconvenient.

NELSON (*looking to the door on the right*): I will go next door.

RECTOR: And when Lady Hamilton——

NELSON (*interrupting eagerly*): Has *she* come ? (*His face alight, he makes a movement towards the door through which THE RECTOR came.*) Why didn't you tell me ?

RECTOR: No, no—not yet. (NELSON *pauses.*) She is to call later to pick up Sir William. I understood him to say she's at the milliner's.

NELSON: I remember. (*With decision*) See Sir William in here. I have some writing to do.

RECTOR (*timidly*): My son—you and Fanny—she has left the house extremely upset. I do trust——

[*He stops.*

NELSON (*shakes his head and says somewhat sternly*): I'm afraid not—the position is impossible.

[NELSON, composed but looking sad, goes out through door on right. THE RECTOR, shaking his head despairingly, goes through back door, but returns a moment later with SIR WILLIAM HAMILTON at his heels. SIR WILLIAM is a short wiry man, in his seventies, clean-shaven, bent, but still displaying a good deal of vigour. For many years Ambassador at the Court of Naples, a mathematician, a musician and collector of objets d'art, he is completely at his ease. SIR WILLIAM is speaking.

SIR WM. : I can speak to you because we are both old men and we both have their welfare at heart.

RECTOR : Yes, yes—you must excuse me if I seemed just now to try and put you off, but I am rather upset.

SIR WM. : Not about your son, I hope.

RECTOR : In a way, yes, but there—I dare say it will smooth itself out. We must trust in God.

SIR WM. : You are a fortunate person to be able to do it. Don't think me irreverent. But I gave it up years ago. Vesuvius, you know—a study of mine—a wanton business in my opinion—if any—er—any—Power is responsible, I mean.

RECTOR : We cannot expect to understand the mystery. There are matters beyond our intelligence. Just as you, a mathematician, Sir William, wouldn't expect a schoolboy to follow *your* reasoning. . . .

SIR WM. : No, no, of course not. But as you say, I am a mathematician. *My* reasoning is all right. Now take your son and my wife——

RECTOR : Oh !

SIR WM. : Pray don't be alarmed. I am not going to say anything unpleasant. But if it is all shaped by Divine hands it seems to me to be very undiplomatic.

RECTOR : I do assure you I am extremely upset.

SIR WM. : Not at all, not at all. I bear your son no ill will. On the contrary, I hold him in the greatest respect and affection. But I can well see that my position must seem a little strange—a little unsatisfactory—to you, and I should like to explain it. You are a man of the world. . . .

RECTOR: I assure you, Sir William, I am nothing of the kind.

SIR WM. (*waving that aside*): You will wonder why I am complaisant.

RECTOR: This is all most painful. I beg you to believe that an hour ago I had no idea of the position—that matters had gone so far.

SIR WM.: The point is—am I to take any notice of the birth of the child when it occurs?

RECTOR: Oh, great heavens! Sir, I beg you to spare me.

SIR WM.: But, sir, it's a very nice problem. The child can hardly be presumed to be my own, my age being what it is. . . .

RECTOR: Really, Sir William. . . .

SIR WM. (*going on unruffled*): And in the circumstances it were better I think that I should remain ignorant of the child's existence. Don't you think so?

RECTOR (*in extreme agitation and discomfort*): I am convinced there must be some profound mistake. Horace would never—

SIR WM.: Tut-tut! Why not? She's a lovely creature, gifted to a degree. He's a gallant fellow, a genius, a hero. (*More sadly*) It was almost inevitable. She was only twenty-one when she first came to me at Naples. Gallerci taught her singing; the professors, French and Italian. I myself used to accompany her on the viola. In those days I was—it seems amusing now—accounted one of the best dancers at Court. And now (*there is a pause*), mind you, I grant you that their impetuosity might have been tempered, but—And, indeed, I don't mind owning that my position has been from time to time a delicate one. But, to be frank, I realised when I married her that sooner or later someone of her own age would— Well, there it is. And if it had to be, who better than your son? It might have been worse. Before he came, Emma was restive. You understand?

RECTOR (*still agitated*): I am completely at a loss. Why do you tell me these things? (*With a little indignation*) Do you expect me to condone my son's conduct or your—your—attitude?



SIR WM. (*sharply*): Ah, I see. You think I'm at fault. You would have me be the outraged husband—insistent on divorce—Um! It has, of course, crossed my mind. I dismissed it. What good would it do?

RECTOR (*throwing up his hands. Then with a little temper*): I should have thought His Majesty's Ambassador would have held his dignity too high to—— How do you know that your very complacency has not worsened the situation? And what of Lady Nelson? Have you thought of her?

SIR WM.: My concern is with your son and my wife. You, sir, as a clergyman, may embrace a wider world with your affections. I am, I confess it, limited. I believe their happiness is bound up with one another and that it is my duty to do what I can for them. I gather you think otherwise?

RECTOR: Oh, I don't know. I am most perplexed. My son holds a place in my heart that not even my wife ever achieved. I love him, sir, with all my strength. And yet he is sinning against God and against the laws of the country. How am I to approve?

SIR WM.: There is another consideration that has been in my mind—the influence of my wife on Nelson's career. If Nelson's work is of supreme importance to England and, indeed, to Europe, and my wife is necessary to him, have I the right to withhold what is in my power to give? . . . I am an old man. My course is run. Emma has been at times a source of great joy to me and a great assistance to me in my work at the Court of Naples. That came to an end. Providence—if you will pardon my making a reference to it—has found her a further avocation. Do I make myself plain?

RECTOR: Yes, yes, there's a measure of comfort in that, but I ask myself how far you are justified in sacrificing the happiness of those about you to some purpose remote. . . . How do we know that my son would be a lesser man were he not so devoted to your wife? (*Drily*) I have heard the Nile described as the perfect naval victory. He was not—forgive the vulgarism—under her spell at that time.

SIR WM.: That is true, and yet the fact that he could control his affairs without her aid and inspiration then is no proof



that he could do so now. How many of us wake up the same two mornings in succession? No, I shall take no precipitate action. I shall close my eyes to a position I can do nothing to improve. I shall, if once more I may be permitted to make a reference in that direction, leave Providence to direct matters to a right end. (*Moving to the door*) And with apologies, my dear sir, for inflicting myself on you—— You can rely on my complete discretion.

[*With THE RECTOR fluttering at his heels, SIR WILLIAM talks himself off. We hear LADY HAMILTON's voice off—loud, hearty—as she greets SIR WILLIAM, who is just about to leave.*

EMMA: La! Sir William, you're just in time for my coach.

SIR WM.: Aren't you coming with me, my dear?

EMMA: What! The moment I arrive? Nay! I shall have to follow.

[*She has now reached the door and looks in—a blooming woman, buxom, still decidedly handsome, though her charms are now mature. She is about thirty-seven. As she reaches the door, NELSON returns and stands awaiting her. She beams on him, but turns to say a parting word to SIR WILLIAM.*

To-day I'm the shadow that never overtakes you. Good-bye, my dear!

[*Turns to RECTOR who has fluttered back, and gives him her hand, over which he stoops.*

How are you, Rector, dear? (*Over his head she smiles at NELSON.*)

RECTOR: With God's help, I shall grow better, your ladyship. These rheumatics of mine——

EMMA: I shall send my good Doctor Bennett to see you——

RECTOR (*drily*): He won't give me new bones, ma'am, and nothing else is much use, I fear.

[*He flutters out again, smiling ruefully, and pulls the door to behind him. As soon as he is gone, NELSON and EMMA go to each other, both overjoyed.*

NELSON: My love!

EMMA: My darling !

[*They kiss.*]

NELSON (*quickly*): Did you get wet? Take off your cloak. You must exercise the utmost care during these next months.

EMMA: Oh, I'm as strong as an ox. It is you, my darling, who must look after yourself. (*Looking closely at him*) You look tired—did you sleep badly? (*Touches his face with her fingers*) Has anything happened? Still worrying over the King's lack of manners? Don't, my dear——

NELSON: No, not that. (*He stands silent a moment, looking at her.*) Something *has* happened.

EMMA: Fanny?

NELSON: Yes.

EMMA (*holding out her hand to take his*): Tell me, darling !

NELSON: I think it is the end. I doubt if we shall meet again.

EMMA (*looking away and speaking thoughtfully*): So it has come at last.

NELSON: Yes, at last.

EMMA: You are sad—a little?

NELSON: Perhaps—a little. It is a break—and my father is distressed by it. But deep in my heart I am most relieved—most. It came suddenly, that's all. (*Fiercely*) But it is release—as though I were setting sail, a springing live deck beneath my feet. You are my life. What have my victories ever been except something to bring to you?

EMMA: They are my glory—and England's glory. (*Pause.*) Dear, dear Nelson, how did I live before I knew you?

NELSON: I sometimes think the half of each of us was sleeping.

EMMA: And do you like it now you have woken?

NELSON: All my life I have been searching for the love in which I could lose myself. At last it has come. I used to say I wanted a son. Now I think it is a daughter I want—a daughter who will be her mother over again.

EMMA: No, no, a son, a son! If I could give you a son there is no woman in the world whose shoes I would wear.

NELSON: My dear one!

EMMA: And you'll not let hard words spoken of us hurt you too much? I can bear it better than you.

NELSON: By God, if I could fight them all! And if we could be safely married, Emma! You are my wife in the sight of God, and such advantage as my name brings, you are entitled to.

EMMA: Perhaps one day we *shall* be married, darling. But could we hurt Sir William now? He has been kind and understanding to us——

NELSON: I know. I have a deep regard for him. (*Pause.*) He must know I love you.

EMMA (*eagerly*): He does, he does.

NELSON: He may wish to divorce you when our daughter is born.

EMMA (*smiling*): Our son——

NELSON: Our son, then. He may wish a divorce and God knows I should welcome it. But divorce means a special Act of Parliament—there's no other way. And we should both require it——

EMMA (*shaking her head*): I don't think Sir William would do it. No, dear. It's no use fretting and striving after what's impossible. We shall have to be patient. After Sir William has gone from us—— (*She stops, disliking to end the sentence.*)

NELSON: So soon as it can be done, it shall be done. But before then the boy will be born.

[*He goes on one knee to her and takes her hand and places his head against her shoulder.*]

EMMA: There, ducky! (*Strokes his hair.*)

NELSON (*lifting his head and speaking with a wry smile*): All sorts of troubles—where he will be born, what he shall be called——

EMMA: Little things. We shall get over them. Perhaps for a while we shall not have to say he's ours. . . .

NELSON (*he rises and paces up and down*): All this secrecy—this deception—I hate it as much as I should surrendering to the French——

EMMA: I know, my darling. But think of our good luck in having one another.

NELSON (*returns to her side and strokes her hair*): My Emma ! No one will ever know how good you are to me.

EMMA (*with a touch of humour*): I dare say not. I warrant there'll be a good deal of venom spilt. But it doesn't really matter. Folk outside never know what there is between two people. (*Sighs.*) I shall have to go, dear. I promised to be in when Mr. Romney calls. He's coming down specially from Kendal.

NELSON (*pretending to frown*): Your Mr. Romney, eh ? The painter you made famous. How old is he ?

EMMA (*demurely*): Seventy, my lord.

NELSON: In that case, you may see him. (*Smiles.*)

EMMA (*serious again*): If Fanny doesn't come back, you'd better stay with Sir William and me again. He misses you, as I do.

NELSON: My happiest days have been with you both.

EMMA: Naples and Palermo once more——

NELSON (*his face lighting up*): If we could live those days over again—the joy of first meeting you.

EMMA: Come to dinner, my love !

NELSON (*gaily*): Not all the Admiralty's sailing orders shall prevent me. (*Then, with longing*) Oh, Emma, we will have long years of peace and happiness yet—when these wars are over and we can be quiet together. Say you believe it !

EMMA (*kissing him*): I believe it, my dear—if you want me to !

[*She goes out, full of spirits, and with a fond glance backwards. NELSON stands looking after her, proud and delighted in her, but his thoughts touched with foreboding. He begins to pace to and fro, deep in thought.*]

A. E. Housman

FRAGMENT OF A GREEK  
TRAGEDY



## CHARACTERS

ALCMAEON

CHORUS

ERIPHYLA (within)

This *Fragment* was first published in *The Bromsgrovian*, a school magazine, in the early eighties. It was reprinted in an amended form in *The Cornhill Magazine*, and is included here by kind permission of Mr. Laurence Housman and Barclays Bank Ltd., as trustees.

ALCMAEON; CHORUS

CHORUS:

O suitably-attired-in-leather-boots  
Head of a traveller, wherefore seeking whom  
Whence by what way how purposed art thou come  
To this well-nightingaled vicinity?  
My object in inquiring is to know.  
But if you happen to be deaf and dumb  
And do not understand a word I say,  
Then wave your hand to signify as much.

ALCMAEON:

I journeyed hither a Boetian road.

CHORUS:

Sailing on horseback, or with feet for oars?

ALCMAEON:

Plying with speed my partnership of legs.

CHORUS:

Beneath a shining or a rainy Zeus?

ALCMAEON:

Mud's sister, not himself, adorns my shoes.

CHORUS:

To learn your name would not displease me much.

ALCMAEON:

Not all that men desire do they obtain.

CHORUS:

Might I then hear at what your presence shoots?

ALCMAEON:

A shepherd's questioned mouth informed me that—

CHORUS:

What? for I know not yet what you would say.

ALCMAEON:

Nor will you ever, if you interrupt.

CHORUS:

Proceed, and I will hold my speechless tongue.

ALCMAEON:

This house is Eriphyla's, no one's else.

CHORUS:

Nor did he shame his throat with hateful lies.

ALCMAEON:

May I then enter, passing through the door?

CHORUS:

Go, chase into the house a lucky foot.  
And, O, my son, be, on the one hand, good,  
And do not, on the other hand, be bad;  
For that is very much the safest plan.

ALCMAEON:

I go into the house with heels and speed.

CHORUS:

In speculation (Strophe.)  
I would not willingly acquire a name  
For ill-digested thought;  
But, after pondering much,  
To this conclusion I, at last, have come:  
*Life is uncertain.*  
This truth I have written deep  
In my reflective midriff.  
On tablets not of wax,  
Nor with a pen did I inscribe it there,  
For many reasons. *Life, I say, is not*  
*A stranger to uncertainty.*  
Not from the flight of omen-yelling fowls  
This fact did I discover,  
Nor did the Delphic tripod bark it out,  
Nor yet Dodona.  
Its native ingenuity sufficed  
My self-taught diaphragm.

Why should I mention (Antistrophe.)  
The Inachaeon daughter, loved of Zeus?  
Her whom of old the gods,

More provident than kind,  
Provided with four hoofs, two horns, one tail,  
A gift not asked for,  
And sent her forth to learn  
The unfamiliar science  
Of how to chew the cud.  
She therefore, all about the Argive fields,  
Went cropping pale green grass and nettle tops,  
Nor did they disagree with her.  
But yet, howe'er nutritious, such repasts  
I do not hanker after.  
Never may Cypris for her seat select  
My dappled liver !  
Why should I mention Io ? Why indeed ?  
I have no notion why.

But now does my boding heart (*Epode.*)  
Unhired, unaccompanied, sing  
A strain not meet for the dance.  
Yea, even the palace appears  
To my yoke of circular eyes  
(The right, nor omit I the left)  
Like a slaughterhouse, so to speak,  
Garnished with many deaths  
And many shipwrecks of cows.  
I therefore, in a Cissian strain, lament  
And to the rapid  
Loud, linen-tattering thumps upon my chest  
Resound in concert  
The battering of my unlucky head.

ERIPHYLA (*within*):

O, I am smitten with a hatchet's jaw ;  
And that in deed and not in word alone.

CHORUS:

I thought I heard a sound within the house  
Unlike the voice of one who jumps for joy.

ERIPHYLA:

He splits my skull, not in a friendly way,  
Once more : he purposes to kill me dead.

CHORUS :

I would not be reputed rash, but yet  
I doubt if all be gay within the home.

ERIPHYLA :

O ! O ! Another stroke ! that makes the third.  
He stabs me to the heart against my wish.

CHORUS :

If that be so, thy state of health is poor ;  
But thine arithmetic is quite correct.



Laurence Housman

THE ANNIVERSARY

(*December 14th, 1862*)

*A Play*

# CHARACTERS

MR. RICHARDS

ANOTHER MANSERVANT

QUEEN VICTORIA

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*The Prince Consort's dressing-room is seen in deep twilight; the blinds are half down; in the Castle Yard outside, the gas-standards are being lighted. The Castle clock strikes seven. No change has been made in the room since the Prince last left it. On an open bureau papers are still lying; on the dressing-table brushes, combs, and other articles of toilet. Beyond the dressing-table is a door leading to the Royal private apartments. On the wall hangs a portrait of the Queen in her youth. Opposite is the service door used by the servants.*

*There is the sound of a key turning in the lock, and MR. RICHARDS, the Prince's valet, enters, followed by another MANSERVANT. MR. RICHARDS is now an old man, rather small and thin, and beginning to be frail. His companion is of larger size, middle-aged, and very correct in his deportment.*

MR. RICHARDS: Come in. (*He closes the door softly.*) James, this is the first time anyone has been in this room since last year—except me and Her Majesty. She has one key; I've another. No one else comes in, so far as I know, unless it's with *her*.

MANSERVANT: Who does the dusting?

RICHARDS (*with a touch of awe*): I don't know. Perhaps *she* does it.

MANSERVANT: The Queen!

RICHARDS: It isn't the Queen comes in here; it's the wife. No, not the wife, the widow. Aye! A year this very day. . . . Now, you stand by, and watch while I show you what you've to do . . . every night.

[*He lights candles, draws blinds and curtains, goes to bureau, gets out clothes, and lays them on couch.*]

RICHARDS: See, this is how they go. Coat and vest there, these here; shoes . . . socks . . . and you put out a fresh shirt every night and change the studs and the links. Have you got that?

MANSERVANT: Yes, I think.

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Applications for permission to perform this play should be made to Pinker's Play Bureau, Talbot House, Arundel Street, Strand, London W.C.2.

RICHARDS: This is the last time I'll be doing it; so be sure you get it right. Her Majesty wished me to stay on for the year, so, of course, I did. Aye, I'd been with him twenty-one years, from the beginning to the end. I'd wanted to leave before, for I was feeling my age even then, but he wouldn't let me—"You stay, Mr. Richards," he said (always called me "Mr."); "it won't be for long." *He* knew.

MANSERVANT: How did this start—your having to do it after he was dead?

RICHARDS: It started after the doctors had been called in. The night after he was taken bad. I'd already put his things out just as usual; next night, I didn't. Two nights after that, the Queen herself sent for me. "Richards," she said, "why haven't you put out His Royal Highness's evening dress, as you always do?" "I thought, Your Majesty——" said I. "You're *not* to think," says she. "His Royal Highness may recover any day. You will go on doing it, unless you receive His Royal Highness's orders not to." . . . I never did receive them. I laid them out again the day he died. He was dead when I did it, though I didn't know. The next day . . . well, I'd just left them. Evening of the day after, I was putting them away again, for good and all. Her Majesty came in from that door. *She* must have thought I was getting them out. "You will do that always," she said, "till further orders." And went quick out again. So that's how it's been ever since. And now that I'm leaving it's to be you. And you are to do it every night, till you receive other orders, . . . which you never will.

MANSERVANT: My God! It's—it's like being in a grave.

RICHARDS (*moving to the door*): Yes.

MANSERVANT: Do we leave the candles?

RICHARDS (*giving the word quiet weight*): Yes. . . . To-morrow I give you this key. I keep it till I leave. You lock the door when you go out; and you don't let anyone else in.

[*They go out; the locking of the door is heard. The clock chimes the quarter past. From the other door THE QUEEN enters, dressed in deep mourning. She comes forward, looks to see that the clothes are*

laid out, then turns to the dressing-table and begins handling the things on it, one after another. She takes up a pair of hair-brushes, looks at them fondly, shakes her head, and lays them down again. Then she takes up a razor-case, opens it, considers it for a while; this time her gesture indicates assent. She takes out one of the razors, kisses it, and puts it away in the drawer of the looking-glass; then, closing the case, and keeping it still in her hand, pulls the rope-bell near by. Having rung, she stands facing the mirror, and does not turn when the key sounds in the lock, and RICHARDS again enters from the opposite door. Looking at his reflection in the glass, as he halts at a distance, she speaks:

VICTORIA: Mr. Richards, before you go, I want to thank you for your services—your faithful services—to both of us.

*From MR. RICHARDS comes a choked response, of which only the words "Your Majesty" become audible.*

His Royal Highness, your master, had a great regard for you.

RICHARDS: Oh, Your Majesty, I loved him!

VICTORIA: I know . . . so I want to give you now something that was his, and that you were accustomed to use in your attendance on him; I had intended, at first, to give you these hair-brushes, but I couldn't let *them* go.

RICHARDS (*with emotion*): No, Your Majesty.

VICTORIA: So here is his case of razors. I have kept *one*. Please take all the rest. And now—you may go.

*[She hands him the case, still not looking at him. He takes it, and backs respectfully to a distance. He goes out.]*

THE QUEEN *flings herself down upon the outspread clothes.*

VICTORIA: Oh, Albert, my King, my King! How can I live without you? Albert! Albert!

CURTAIN



6904

Philip Johnson

THE GOOD AND THE BAD

*A Play*

# TO MR. HAROLD J. STERN

## PERSONS OF THE PLAY

MRS. KENTISH

ROD KENTISH

JIM KENTISH

RIAH HOLLS

ABEL GUNTER

TWO MEN from the village

*This play was first produced at THE PLAYHOUSE, LIVERPOOL, by MR. WILLIAM ARMSTRONG, on January 29th, 1929, with the following cast:*

<i>Riah Holls</i>	—	—	—	—	—	ALFRED SANGSTER
<i>Abel Gunter</i>	—	—	—	—	—	LLOYD PEARSON
<i>Mrs. Kentish</i>	—	—	—	—	—	PAULINE LACEY
<i>Rod Kentish</i>	—	—	—	—	—	ROBERT DONAT
<i>Jim Kentish</i>	—	—	—	—	—	BASIL MOSS

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SCENE: *The living-room of MRS. KENTISH's cottage in a small fishing village. The room is small and low-ceilinged, and is lit by a window up C. On the L. side of the back wall is a door which gives access to the outside world; a door down L. leads to the kitchen. Above this door, against the L. wall, is an oak dresser. On the R. is the fireplace, and below this is another door leading to the bedrooms. The furniture is unpretentious and plain. A grandfather clock stands above the fireplace. In the centre of the room is a round table covered by a plush tablecloth upon which stands a lit oil-lamp. There are chairs at each side of the table, and close to the fire is an old rocking-chair. A few pictures, mostly of a seafaring nature, and one or two colourful texts and calendars are hanging on the walls.*

*When the curtain rises it is one hour before the dawn of a day in early summer. The room is dimly lit by the lamp, the wick of which is turned down. The window is concealed by drawn curtains. During the night, which is so soon to end, a storm has sprung up and raged. This, however, has now abated considerably, though the wind can still be heard whistling and moaning.*

*The room is empty. Outside the cottage a dog is barking and snarling. A knock is heard at the door back L.; the knock is repeated; the door is opened from the outside and ABEL GUNTER and RIAH HOLLS enter. They are two men from the village, both of them old, their seafaring days ended. They are wearing great-coats and sou'-wester hats. Upon the threshold of the room they hesitate.*

HOLLS (*at the door up L. The shorter of the two. His voice is thin and quavering*): There's no one here, Abel.

GUNTER: I can see that for myself. (*He comes a little down stage. His manner suggests that he is endeavouring to overcome a great uneasiness.*) Shut that door.

[HOLLS closes the door and comes down to GUNTER. The dog outside, after a querulous yelp or two, relapses into silence.]

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All applications for permission to perform this play must be made to Messrs. Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2; or, for South Africa, to Messrs. Samuel French, Ltd., P.O. Box 497, Nairobi; or, for Canada, to Messrs. Samuel French (Canada), Ltd., 480 University Avenue, Toronto; or, for the U.S.A., to Messrs. Samuel French, Inc., 25 West 45th Street, New York City, or 811 West 7th Street, Los Angeles, California.

The play is published by Messrs. Samuel French at 1s. net.

HOLLS: Well?

GUNTER: Eh?

HOLLS: What are we to do now?

GUNTER: She must be somewhere in the house. (*Below the table to L.*).

HOLLS: She'd 'ave 'eard us knock. (*Above the table to the fire R.*) That dog too; wouldn't she 'ave 'eard that?

GUNTER: I expect she's abed.

HOLLS: Would she go to bed and leave the lamp lit? An' see, there's a few coals still red in the 'earth. (*Tremulously*) I'd give a deal to be out o' this. My 'eart fair fails me, that it does, at the business we 'ave in front of us.

GUNTER (*moves up L. and down again*): It's got to be done: somebody's got to tell 'er.

HOLLS: Maybe. All the same, it's 'ard to 'ave to tell a poor widow-woman that 'er——

GUNTER: Don't be 'arpin' on it. (*To L. of the table.*) It's got to be, I tell you.

HOLLS (*moves to R. C.*): I'm thinking it would have been more seemly for the womenfolk to 'ave told 'er. Women can be comfortin' at a time like this. I'm a soft-'earted man, an' I——

GUNTER (*brusquely*): Stop your twittering, man, an' let's be findin' 'er. . . . (*Below the table to the door down R.*) If it's in bed she is, then we must go an' wake 'er.

[*He makes a move towards the door R.*]

HOLLS: Abel, wait a minute.

GUNTER (*pausing half-way to the door*): Eh?

HOLLS: Is it fittin', think you, for two able-bodied men like you an' me to walk into the bedroom of a widow-woman?

GUNTER (*contemptuously*): A withered-up faggot of a man like you could walk into any woman's bedroom without fear o' clackin' tongues. Come on!

HOLLS (*still reluctant*): But——

GUNTER: Come on! I tell you. We can knock at the door and wake her.



[GUNTER goes out by the door R. and HOLLS, not without some trepidation, follows him. The stage is empty. The voices of the two MEN can be heard off, calling.

GUNTER }  
HOLLS } (together): Mrs. Kentish! Mrs. Kentish! Are ye in, madam?

[Meeting with no response, HOLLS and GUNTER return.

HOLLS (re-entering): You see—the woman isn't in the 'ouse at all.

[GUNTER makes no reply. He crosses to L. and stands silent, pondering.

(After a moment of silence) What will we do now?

GUNTER (shortly): Do? Wait, of course.

[Puts his hat on the dresser.

They lapse into silence. HOLLS, obviously very ill at ease, sits down in a chair R. of the table; GUNTER commences to pace to and fro across the back of the room.

HOLLS (after a pause): 'Tis a queer business, Abel.

GUNTER (continuing to pace—muttering): H'm. H'm.

HOLLS (his gaze travelling round the room): This 'ere 'ouse, so quiet an' still . . . waiting.

GUNTER (halting): Waiting?

HOLLS: Aye, waiting. It's sheltered 'er an' them two lads these many years. It knows 'em, this 'ouse does, p'raps better than they know themselves. It's seen them two lads grow from child'ood to man'ood. Why, it's in this very room they used to play when they was childer, an' in front o' that fire their mother used to bath 'em of a Saturday night. They'll 'ave forgotten, they will; or, if they remember at all, it'll be 'azy an' blurred: just bits, 'ere an' there . . . but I reckon this 'ouse 'asn't forgotten.

GUNTER (L.): If I 'adn't been with you all night I'd say you'd been drinking.

HOLLS (not heeding): Why, it's through that window there they caught their first glimpse o' the sea. I reckon they laughed an' clapped their 'ands then, as young things do when they see anything that shines an' glitters. Later on they'd come to know it were that shining, glittering thing

'ad robbed 'em of their dad. . . . An' later on still, they'd come to know it wanted them, too. They'd 'ear the call and fear the urge of it in their blood.

GUNTER (*scornfully*): 'Ear the call !

[*Leans against the dresser L. and lights his pipe.*]

HOLLS: Loud an' clear in the daytime; an' in the night whisperin' so soft to 'em as they lay in their beds. . . . Aye, they 'eard it right enough, did Rod and Jim Kentish. This 'ouse saw 'em go in answer to it; an' now it's waitin' for one of 'em to come back . . . for the last time.

GUNTER (*up to the window—with nervous irritation*): Where can she be?—that's what I want to know.

HOLLS: Maybe she knows already an' 'as gone down to the 'arbour.

GUNTER: Talk sense ! 'Ow could she know ?

[*Moves to the fire.*]

HOLLS: She may 'ave 'ad a sign, same as my mother did when 'er boy Dan were drowned. Come to 'er as clear as daylight, 'e did. "Mother," he says, an' 'eld out 'is 'ands to 'er. Many's the time she'd told us 'ow 'e 'eld out 'is 'ands.

[*GUNTER ignores this and moves to above the table to down L.*]

GUNTER: It'd all 'ave been over by now, if she'd been 'ere. We'd 'ave got it off our chests.

HOLLS: An' she'd be grievin'. I can't abear to see a woman cry. But will she grieve much, do you think, Abel ?

GUNTER (*L. C.*): It depends. Maybe she will . . . an' maybe she won't.

HOLLS: Eh ?

GUNTER: If it be Jim the sea 'as taken from 'er this night, then I'm thinkin' she'll be a broken woman, Riah Holls—aye, a broken woman. . . . But if it be Rod—

HOLLS: If it be Rod—

GUNTER (*after a pause—then slowly*): There'll be little cause for sorrow then. Rod Kentish is known along this stretch of coast, from end to end; an' if it should be 'im that's gone, there's never a body that'll not say—"It's just as well."

HOLLS: Save, maybe, 'ere an' there—a woman.

GUNTER (*contemptuously*): Pah! Wanton gypsy women an' suchlike foreign trash! I tell you 'e's a scapegrace an' a scamp, is Rod Kentish. (*To L. of the table.*) Scum! It's a miracle to me he's missed seein' the inside o' the county jail. But 'is time will come—you mark my words—'is time will come.

[*Moves to the door up L.*

HOLLS: It may 'ave come already, Abel.

GUNTER: What d'ye mean?

HOLLS: This night . . . when the *Lapwing* went down. . . . We don't know.

GUNTER: I wish to God we did. It would be easier if we could tell 'er it's that rapscaillon Rod she'd never see no more.

HOLLS: But we can't, Abel.

GUNTER: Don't I know it, you fool! (*He turns away and recommences his pacing of the room.*) Where can the woman be this time o' night?

[*He opens the outer door. The wind is howling.*

HOLLS: It must be pretty near morning.

GUNTER (*closes the door*): An' me never as much as laid me down for a wink o' sleep.

HOLLS: I've never known a storm blow up so quick.

GUNTER: They blew up a deal quicker when I were young.

HOLLS: An' now it's blown itself out. . . . But a good ship's lyin' on the bottom o' the sea. (*Lights his pipe.*) She were a snug little craft were the *Lapwing*.

GUNTER: As good as any round these parts. (*He pauses in his pacing.*) But ships is like men, Riah Holls. 'Tisn't always the best man or the best ship as weathers the storm. There's such a thing as luck, or chance, or whatever folk like to call it.

HOLLS: Force o' circumstances, so to speak.

GUNTER: The greatest force in the world; for it's that what sends the sound-timbered craft to the bottom, and lets the rotten 'ulk come safe to 'arbour.

HOLLS: Maybe you're right.

GUNTER (*at the fire*): I know I'm right: I'm a thinkin' man, I am.

HOLLS: So folk say.

GUNTER (*with pride*): When I were a young lad I 'ad the sense to see that the world were made up of two sorts o' men: them as thinks, an' them as gets married. I took to thinkin'.

HOLLS (*admiringly*): I reckon there's little you don't know.

GUNTER: I can see a deal further than the end o' my nose.

HOLLS: It's different with me.

GUNTER: Ah !

HOLLS: There's a many things puzzle me, Abel.

GUNTER: No doubt. No doubt.

HOLLS: For instance—why some men are good, like Jim Kentish, an' some bad, like Rod Kentish.

GUNTER (*points to HOLLS*): That's accounted for in two words: 'uman nature.

HOLLS: Ah !

GUNTER (*R. C.*): An' even I don't reckon to understand 'uman nature. An' why not? Because there is no understanding it. The man who can fathom it 'as yet to be born.

HOLLS (*shaking his head*): An' maybe 'e never will be.

GUNTER: Folk 'ave ferreted out a deal since the world began. They've wormed out the secret o' this and the secret o' that. The one thing what beats 'em is the secret o' themselves.

HOLLS: That's a everlasting mystery.

GUNTER: The everlasting mystery o' 'uman nature.

HOLLS: 'Ere's Rod an' Jim, two childer, born an' bred o' the same parents, both of 'em living 'ere like two peas in a shell; yet one of 'em grows up to be a good man, an' the other . . . bad.

GUNTER (*below the table to L.*): Rod Kentish 'as a soul as black and wild as this night's been.



HOLLS: It's little I know of souls, though it's said we've all got one. If that be so, then I reckon Rod's must be kind o' warped.

GUNTER (*L. C.*): Warped an' twisted, like the rotten timber of a 'ulks that's been lying on the rocks these many years. (*Sits L. of the table.*) Aye, 'e'll 'ave a deal to answer for, will Rod Kentish.

[*The wind grows louder.*]

HOLLS: An' maybe, even now . . .

GUNTER: What?

HOLLS: One o' the two men o' this 'ouse is drowned this night. But we don't know . . . which. One of 'em will come back with the boats on the mornin' tide; but the other, 'e'll never come back, save only the battered body of 'im . . . or maybe the restless spirit of 'im.

[*He breaks off as the dog outside utters a long and mournful howl.*]

HOLLS rises from the chair.

(*In a scared voice*) 'Ush!

GUNTER (*rises*): What is it?

[*The dog, after the one prolonged howl, relapses into silence.*]

[*Only the sound of the wind is heard.*]

HOLLS (*below the table to L.*): That dog!—and footsteps—I could 'ave sworn I 'eard footsteps.

[*GUNTER goes to the door, opens it, peers out, then closes it again and returns downstage.*]

GUNTER (*to above the table*): There's nobody there. It must have been the wind you 'eard.

HOLLS: Maybe. (*Still very ill at ease, he moves R. and stands by the fireplace.*) I wish to God this business were over.

GUNTER: Where can the woman be? It's queer.

[*He sits down on the chair vacated by HOLLS, R. of the table.*]

HOLLS (*L. C.*): An' the way the wind sounds: that's queer, too.

GUNTER: The wind?

HOLLS (*up to the window*): Fair tearing round the 'ouse, it is, though down in the village it 'ad quieted a good hour ago.



GUNTER (*matter of fact*): It's always blowin' up 'ere.

HOLLS (*uneasily*): I never noticed it afore.

GUNTER: It don't say a thing don't exist just because you don't 'appen to 'ave noticed it.

HOLLS (*moving C. to GUNTER*): Where can she be? Why, the men should be 'ere any time now. (*Moves to the fire.*) They'll be 'ere afore we've 'ad a chance o' tellin' 'er.

[GUNTER rises.

'Ush!

[*The two MEN stand motionless, listening. The door, up L., opens and MRS. KENTISH enters. She is a rather frail woman of about sixty years of age, and is wearing a large shawl draped round her shoulders and over her head. That life has not been entirely easy or free from problems is evinced by the deep lines and tired expression of her face, and by the tiny nerve that twitches at the corner of her mouth. She becomes immediately aware of the presence of the two MEN; a little gasp and half cry of fear escapes her; then, recognizing them, she closes the door behind her.*

MRS. KENTISH (*L. C.—looking from one to the other*): Mr. Gunter! Mr. Holls! Why are . . . Is there anything . . .

[*She is about to demand "Is there anything wrong?" but she falters and gazes inquiringly at the two MEN.*

GUNTER (*R.*): Well, Mrs. Kentish, me an' 'Olls—

HOLLS (*R. C.*): We knocked, Mrs. Kentish, and we shouted.

MRS. KENTISH: I couldn't sleep, couldn't rest. . . . (*Takes off her shawl, hangs it on a hook up L.*) The roaring of the wind. . . . I got up and walked on the headland . . . you wanted me?

GUNTER: Yes.

MRS. KENTISH (*coming down*): Is anything wrong?

GUNTER: Yes, Mrs. Kentish.

MRS. KENTISH: What is it? Oh! Tell me what it is! (*Moves below the table to R. C. Her voice becomes shrill on a sudden note of fear. She grasps GUNTER's arm*): It's Jim!—He's—he's drowned! Mr. Gunter, tell me! Tell me! Jim! No! No! No! I—

[*She lapses into breathless incoherence, gasping and sobbing. The MEN endeavour to soothe her, and, each grasping an arm, they persuade her to sit down, R. of the table.*

HOLLS: There now, ma'am, there now.

GUNTER: Try to quiet yourself, ma'am.

HOLLS: You'd like a little sup of brandy, ma'am?

GUNTER: Just to quiet you a little; just to quiet you.

MRS. KENTISH (*trying to control herself*): No, no, I——

HOLLS (*above the table to down L.*): Or water, ma'am? I'll draw a drop.

MRS. KENTISH: I don't want water, or anything: I just want to know. (*There is a pause. Then, in a whisper*) It's Jim, isn't it? That's why you're here, to tell me he's drowned. (*Her voice rising*) Well, why don't you say it? Why don't you say it?

HOLLS: We can't say it because we don't know.

MRS. KENTISH: You don't know? Then——

GUNTER: There's been a storm, ma'am, sprung up like they do in the summer, from God knows where.

MRS. KENTISH: Yes, yes, I know.

GUNTER: An' the *Lapwing*, ma'am—she won't go out on the tide no more . . . never no more.

[*There is a pause. Then:*

MRS. KENTISH (*in a whisper*): And the men?

HOLLS (*shaking his head—slowly*): Never no more.

GUNTER (*speaking rather quickly*): It sprung up so sudden. The *Happy Voyager* were the nearest, an' she tried to—to—but it were no use, not with the tide runnin' like that. All they managed to drag aboard were the body of a drowned man.

HOLLS (*L. of the table—not giving her time to speak*): They put about an' brought 'im back to harbour an' laid him in the sail shed, while they nailed a two-three planks o' wood together.

GUNTER: To carry 'im on, up 'ere.

MRS. KENTISH: To carry him . . . here?

GUNTER: 'They thought it best for me an' 'Olls to——

[*Moves above the table to L. C.*

*At a little gesture from her he breaks off. She remains silent for a moment, her back to the MEN, then turns and faces them.*

MRS. KENTISH (*her voice trembling*): You can tell me now.

[*Then, as neither of them reply.*

Is it Rod, or is it Jim?

HOLLS (*L.*): Ma'am, we don't know.

MRS. KENTISH: You're making it no easier for me, Riah Holls.

GUNTER (*L. C.—taking a hesitant step towards her*): 'E's speakin' Gospel truth, ma'am. We don't know. (*L. of the table.*) Both your sons went out last night, one of 'em aboard the *Lapwing* and the other on the *Dusky Bride*. But there's none can say which boat carried which man; not a body in the village can swear to the one as set sail on the *Lapwing*: whether 'twere Rod or Jim. Some say one and some say t'other.

MRS. KENTISH: But the man—the drowned man!

HOLLS: 'E's one o' your sons, ma'am. The build of 'im; there's no gainsaying that.

GUNTER: That's all there is to tell 'im by: 'is build. For 'is face . . .

MRS. KENTISH: Go on, Abel Gunter . . . his face?

GUNTER: The wave that washed 'im against the *Happy Voyager* were strong an' swift an' cruel . . . An' no man can look upon its 'andiwork an' say: "This is Rod," or "This is Jim."

MRS. KENTISH: Or Jim.

HOLLS: But in the morning, ma'am . . . when the boats come home we'll know.

[*MRS. KENTISH seems scarcely to have heard this. The two MEN stand beside her, constrained and awkward in the consciousness of their inability to help. Her eyes gaze fixedly in front of her. There is a silence. Then:*

GUNTER: You're not alone in your grief, ma'am. Three other 'omes in the village will know sorrow this night.

[*She does not speak. The two MEN exchange glances over her head.*]

HOLLS: Let you take 'eart, ma'am, for the dear sake o' the one that's comin' back to you with the morning tide.

MRS. KENTISH (*in a whisper—her lips scarcely moving*): If it should be Jim.

HOLLS: I've 'ad sons. I know what it is to love 'em—aye, an' to lose 'em. There were my George, as good a lad as ever lived . . . an' died.

[*A murmuring of voices outside the cottage becomes audible, and the dog commences to bark. MRS. KENTISH hears the sound, her body stiffens, but she does not move. There is a low knock at the door. GUNTER goes to the door, opens it, and steps outside.*]

GUNTER's voice is heard outside.

GUNTER (*heard off*): Bring him in. Bring him in here.

[*GUNTER re-enters, followed by two MEN, supporting between them a roughly contrived stretcher of planks, upon which there lies an object covered with one or two rough coats. On the threshold the MEN stand silent and still, looking inquiringly towards GUNTER for directions. The latter comes down to where MRS. KENTISH is seated.*]

Maybe if we was to lay him on the kitchen table, ma'am.

[*She does not reply, does not seem to have heard, and he repeats his suggestion in a slightly louder tone.*]

On the kitchen table, ma'am?

[*This time she nods her head. He goes back to the MEN and points to L. door. HOLLS goes and opens the door. The two MEN, obeying, carry their burden off L. HOLLS and GUNTER follow them.*]

*The stage is now empty, save for MRS. KENTISH. She shifts her position a little, placing her elbows on the table and resting her bowed head in her hand.*

*There is a low murmur of voices from the kitchen. GUNTER and HOLLS re-enter, followed by the two MEN. The latter stand for a moment, awkward and constrained, as though nerving themselves to approach the woman and offer sympathy. GUNTER, however, motions them to go, and they exit, closing the door very silently behind them. GUNTER comes downstage to MRS. KENTISH.*

(*To L. of the table.*) Me an' 'Olls, we'll bide with you till——



MRS. KENTISH (*not moving*): No, no, I'll not be troubling you.

GUNTER: But we'd sooner stay, ma'am, indeed we would.

MRS. KENTISH: I'd sooner be alone.

GUNTER (*still a little unwilling*): If—if you really mean it, ma'am.

[*Mrs. KENTISH nods her head.*

Very well, ma'am.

[*Moves L., takes his hat from the dresser.*

[*He motions to HOLLS, and together they go towards the door, back L. Arrived there, they hesitate, then HOLLS returns down-stage to Mrs. KENTISH.*

HOLLS: If you please, ma'am. (*Picks up his hat from the table. With a gesture towards the kitchen door*) I'd not be going in there if I was you . . . It's—it's——

MRS. KENTISH (*nodding her head*): I see.

[*HOLLS rejoins GUNTER and, after venturing a pitying glance at the figure of the woman, they leave, closing the door behind them.*

MRS. KENTISH *is alone.*

*She does not stir, only her lips move tremulously. The wind is heard again moaning and whistling round the house.*

*She piteously asks herself, "Is it Jim? Is it . . . Jim?" At last she rises and walks slowly towards the kitchen door. Arrived there, she hesitates, as though endeavouring to summon up courage to enter. The moment her fingers close upon the handle the dog outside utters a long howl. She draws back terrified, then turns and leans against the door as if for support, her limbs trembling, her face distorted by fear.*

*The door, back L., opens silently, and ROD KENTISH steps into the room. His face and figure is that of a seafaring man of about twenty-three or -four. He is wearing a dark blue jersey, breeches, and leggings. During the following scene his speech is slow and occasionally somewhat halting, and his voice is low. His movements, too, are slow and deliberate, as though the making of them costs him some little effort.*

MRS. KENTISH *slowly turns and sees him.*

(*Dully*) So—it's you—it's Rod !



ROD: Yes, Mother—it's Rod.

*[He closes door.]*

*It seems as if her feelings are about to overwhelm her, but with an effort she controls herself and takes a step towards him. He remains by the door.*

MRS. KENTISH: They've told you?

ROD: Told me?

MRS. KENTISH: Gunter and Holls—you met them on the way up?

ROD: I met no one the way I came.

MRS. KENTISH: Then you—you don't know?

ROD: What is it, Mother?

MRS. KENTISH (*below the table to the fire R.—wildly*): What is it? I'll tell you. It's sorrow for me all the days of my life, God grant they be few.

ROD: Sorrow? Why?

MRS. KENTISH: Isn't that what I'll be asking myself from the dawning of one day to the dawning of another? Why?

*[She sways a little, and sits above the fire.]*

*(As if speaking to herself)* I reckon I'm an old woman now . . . as old as my mother was when they carried her over the hill. . . . "In the morning . . . when the boats come home . . . we'll know." . . . That's what they said. (*To Rod, but without turning her head*) Why do you skulk there in the shadows? Is it that you're shamed, shamed to be treading the earth when he's . . .? Oh, but my heart's broke this night; broke, I tell you.

ROD: This night? You said I broke it years ago.

MRS. KENTISH: So you did, Rod Kentish . . . into little pieces. But a heart may be broken more than once in a lifetime.

ROD (*in a whisper*): I'm sorry, Mother.

MRS. KENTISH (*not heeding him*): And now, as if I hadn't suffered enough—this. I'll not go on living! I couldn't! I couldn't!

ROD: Mother.

MRS. KENTISH (*still not heeding him*): A good mother I've been to both of you. And what am I left with now? The memory of him and the everlasting shame of you.

ROD (*louder*): Mother, I—

MRS. KENTISH (*turning and facing him*): What is it you have to say to me?

ROD: I'm sorry.

MRS. KENTISH: Sorry.

ROD: Yes.

MRS. KENTISH: I see. (*Harshly*) Why don't you come in, instead of standing there in the shadow?

[*He moves forward a pace or two, but still remains in the shadows.*]

Sorry! Is that what you say? I've known you for a liar, and a thief, so it doesn't surprise me to find you a hypocrite as well.

ROD: I'm not being a hypocrite, not now.

MRS. KENTISH: I want none of your play-acting.

ROD: There's things I've got to say to you.

MRS. KENTISH: I don't want to hear them.

ROD (*with persistence*): You've got to. You've got to believe me, now, Mother.

MRS. KENTISH: Believe you! The truth isn't in you, as every mortal soul in these parts knows full well. You know what they call you?

ROD: They've called me a many things.

MRS. KENTISH: Trash! That's what they call you: trash! And that's what you are.

ROD: It's what I was, maybe.

MRS. KENTISH: And always will be. I've no hope for you; I had once; but not now.

ROD: But, you're my mother.

MRS. KENTISH (*rising*): I don't need to be reminded of that. I've only to walk the length of the village street to feel the eyes of every woman pitying me for being the mother of you. (*A pause. Then almost fiercely*) Look at me . . . look at me!

[*He is silent.*]

Well?

ROD (*haltingly*): You—you look kind of tired.

MRS. KENTISH: Go on !

ROD: And—and old.

MRS. KENTISH: A tired old woman, that's what I am ; and it's you that's made me so. (*Then, speaking more slowly*) And maybe it's in that your punishment lies.

ROD: Punishment.

MRS. KENTISH: Aye, your just punishment. The knowledge within you that it isn't the years have made your mother old and tired, but the torment of her own son's evil.

ROD: Don't be saying such things !

MRS. KENTISH: Maybe there'll come a time when every line of my face and every grey hair on my head'll be like a knife in the black soul of you.

ROD: Don't, Mother, don't.

MRS. KENTISH (*R. of the table*): And when I'm dead and gone, you'll try to forget me ; but you won't be able to. Think of it, Rod Kentish, think of it. No comfort then in the arms of your gypsy wantons ; it'll not be their dark eyes that'll look into yours, but mine ! Mine !

ROD: I've done with them, Mother, I've done with them.

MRS. KENTISH: What's that you're saying ?

ROD: The gypsy girls. *I'll* walk no more with them through the fields at sunset.

MRS. KENTISH: Maybe it's *they* have done with *you*.

[*Moving to the fire.*]

ROD: I'll walk no more with any girls . . . never no more ; nor lie in the sun, nor walk with my bare feet over the hot sand, not taste the salt on my lips, never no more.

[*MRS. KENTISH goes nearer to him. For a moment they face each other in silence, then :*]

MRS. KENTISH: You mean—you're going away ?

ROD: Yes—away.

MRS. KENTISH: From the sea ?

ROD: I've got to go.

MRS. KENTISH: Got to go? (*With sudden fear*) You—you mean you're running away from something—you've done?

ROD: No, not that, Mother, not that.

MRS. KENTISH: Then—why?

ROD: I've got to go. And before I go, there's something I want, something you can give me.

MRS. KENTISH: Haven't I given you enough?

[*Turning from him.*]

ROD: There's still something more.

MRS. KENTISH: Money, you mean! I've none for you!

ROD (*shaking his head*): I don't want money.

MRS. KENTISH: I've nothing for you! Nothing for anybody! (*Below the table to L. She turns from him and looks towards the door L.*) How should I have when the little I had has been taken from me?

ROD: You *can* give me this one thing. Nobody else can but you, my mother.

MRS. KENTISH (*facing him again—wonderingly*): Nobody but me? (*Then, with a harder note in her voice*) Well, what is this one thing you're craving for?

ROD (*very quietly*): Forgiveness.

MRS. KENTISH: You come to me for that!

ROD: Yes.

[*Holds his hands out to her.*]

MRS. KENTISH (*coldly—deliberately*): I've told you before, I want none of your play-acting.

ROD (*urgently*): It's the last thing I'll ever ask of you.

MRS. KENTISH: The first thing I ever gave you was life: and I've lived to rue the day I gave you that.

ROD (*bitterly*): Same as you would if I'd been born a cripple.

MRS. KENTISH (*with vehemence*): That's not true, I'd have loved a child of mine none the less for being a cripple. To be born with a twisted limb, that's a pitiful thing.

ROD: Pitiful—yes. But to be born with a twisted conscience, that's different, isn't it?

MRS. KENTISH: What do you mean?

ROD: I'd find it kind of hard to tell you, Mother; and you'd find it hard to understand.

MRS. KENTISH (R.): I gave up trying to understand you long ago.

ROD: Maybe that was wrong—to give up trying.

MRS. KENTISH: Wrong! (*Becoming more and more wrought up*) Are you trying to tell me I've not been a good mother to you? Why should the good be taken away, while the wicked are allowed to flourish?

[*As though overcome by a sudden weariness, she turns from ROD and goes and sits down again, her elbows resting upon the table, her forehead supported by her hands. Sitting there, bowed and grief-stricken, in the yellow circle of lamplight, she forms a picture of suffering. In the dark background of shadows ROD stands immovable, gazing at her. . . . The wind has dropped and there is no sound whatever.*]

ROD: There's no place in your heart for me, Mother: I can see that plain enough; and maybe it's little right I have to wonder at it. I know only too well the kind of son I've been to you—an everlasting pain, that's what I've been.

[*He pauses, she remains silent, and he continues.*]

It'd be a wonderful thing if I could ease that pain.

MRS. KENTISH (*in a low voice*): No mortal can ease the pain that's in my heart.

ROD: If we could come closer together—you and me—now——

MRS. KENTISH (*still in a very low voice*): Jim! Jim! I loved you so; loved you so.

ROD: If only we could, Mother; if only we could.

MRS. KENTISH: The good are crushed down into the darkness, but the wicked come home on the morning tide.

ROD: Mother!

[*Backing away from her.*]

MRS. KENTISH (*with sudden fierceness*): Why don't you come into the light, instead of whispering and muttering there? Come here!



ROD (*his body pressed against the wall*): No ! No !

MRS. KENTISH: You and your talk of twisted consciences. Save it for them as are like to listen to you. I want none of your smooth tongue. I know it too well.

ROD: This is the truth, the truth.

MRS. KENTISH (*harshly*): Would I find the truth in you ? I'd as soon look for water-lilies in a cesspool.

ROD: So as you'll be able to think different of me—that's all I want.

MRS. KENTISH: It's a deal too late in the day for you to start daubing yourself with whitewash.

ROD: But this time !

MRS. KENTISH: Neither this time nor any other time.

ROD: When I'm going away, going for good.

MRS. KENTISH: I mind the last time you said you were going away for good, aye, and the time before that, too.

ROD: This time I *am* going.

MRS. KENTISH: Oh, aye.

ROD: I'm your son, and you'll never look upon my face again.

MRS. KENTISH: The son I loved—I'll never look upon his face again.

ROD: So very soon, Mother, I'll be gone.

MRS. KENTISH: Then why don't you go ? (*Turns her back to him.*)

ROD: You'll not listen ?

MRS. KENTISH: No, Rod Kentish ; my heart's like a rock this night, cold and hard.

ROD: I might bring warmth to it.

MRS. KENTISH (*with bitterness*): You !

ROD (*after a pause, slowly*): Maybe in the years to come you'll think different of me.

MRS. KENTISH: It isn't of you I'll be thinking in the years to come.

[*She looks towards the kitchen.*]

ROD: Will you be able to help yourself? No.—When you see the face of the sea turn pale under a winter moon you'll think of me; when you feel the chill wind at the close of a sultry day you'll think of me.

MRS. KENTISH: Have done! Have done!

ROD: When you hear the cry of a lonely sea-bird in the cold of the dawn you'll think of me.

MRS. KENTISH: Go! Why don't you go!

ROD: Such memories, Mother.—They'll be terrible and bitter—I could have made them beautiful.—But you wouldn't listen—you wouldn't listen.

MRS. KENTISH: Leave me alone. Can't you see I want to be alone!

*[Very silently, hugging the shadows by the wall, he crosses to the kitchen door. There he pauses.]*

ROD (*his hand on the door*): So cold—and so dark. (*Suddenly his figure becomes rigid, and he lifts his head as though listening.*) But what's that? Can't you hear it? Can't you hear it?

MRS. KENTISH: I can hear nothing.

ROD (*in a whisper*): Like an echo—the echo of a quiet song you used to sing.

*[Without making the slightest sound he opens the door and passes through.]*

*Silence falls upon the room. MRS. KENTISH stretches her arms out upon the table in front of her and bows her head.*

*The door, back L., is flung open and JIM KENTISH enters, closes the door behind him and strides into the room. In appearance and build he is similar to ROD, but in contrast to the latter his movements are vigorous and alert, and his voice is lusty. His clothes, too, are the counterpart of those worn by his brother, with the addition of a sou'wester hat. His mother, hearing the sound of his entry, raises her head. The moment her eyes fall upon him she utters a little gasping cry and springs to her feet, and, with one hand pressed to her heart, faces him, her figure taut and rigid with terror.*

JIM (*taking a step towards her*): Mother!

*[Throwing his cap and oilskin on a chair.]*

MRS. KENTISH (*rises and backs against R. door—retreating, and holding out her hand as though to ward off a blow*): No ! No !

JIM: Why, Mother.

MRS. KENTISH: Don't come near me. Don't touch me !

JIM: You're upset, Mother, that's what it is. I've heard. They told us when we landed. But you must try and bear up, and not take on so. It'll do no good, that won't. . . . Where have they put him ? (*With a gesture towards the kitchen*) In there ?

MRS. KENTISH (*never taking her eyes off him*): Put him ?

JIM: Rod. They said they'd brought him home.

[*As she does not reply, does not move, he advances towards her. This time she does not retreat. When he is close to her she puts out a trembling hand and touches his face. Then:*

MRS. KENTISH (*in a whisper*): Jim, it's really you !

JIM: It's me right enough.

MRS. KENTISH: But—Rod—

JIM: I know, Mother, I know. Soon as I landed they told me.

MRS. KENTISH: Then ! Oh !

[*She collapses on his shoulder. JIM moves as though to put his arms round her, but she draws back.*

JIM: Come, you mustn't take it so badly.

[*There is a silence. Then:*

MRS. KENTISH (*her voice trembling*): Go into that room and bid him come here.

JIM: Bid who come here ?

MRS. KENTISH: Rod.

JIM: But, Mother—

MRS. KENTISH: Do as I tell you. Go and bid him come here.

[*After a moment of puzzled hesitation JIM goes to the kitchen door L., flings it open and stands staring into the room beyond. As he does she steps C., her arms outstretched, murmuring, "Rod, Rod."*

JIM: There's no one in there.

MRS. KENTISH: No one ?

JIM (*closing the door and coming down to her*): The room is empty, save only the poor drowned body of him, and no sound, save the drip of the water from the table to the floor.

MRS. KENTISH: An empty room ! It's terrible !

JIM (*to above the table—quietly*): No, mother, no—leastways, it'll not seem so when you've got over the shock.

MRS. KENTISH (*sits R. of the table; nodding her head as though to emphasize the word*): Terrible !

JIM: You'll see it then as I see it now—as, well, as maybe the best thing that could happen. (*Kneels beside her.*) Try and look at it like that, Mother, 'cause that's what it really is. You know what Rod's life was, all wild and stormy. I don't want to say anything against him, not now. (*Eagerly*) And that's how it'll be, nobody'll want to say anything against him, ever again. It's all finished ! All the misery and shame he's caused you—that's at an end.

MRS. KENTISH: It's terrible—terrible.

JIM: No, no.

[*Pulls her towards him.*]

MRS. KENTISH: I should have listened to what he had to say, but I wouldn't; I hardened my heart and wouldn't listen.

JIM: You've listened to him often enough, I reckon.

MRS. KENTISH: But this night—he was different.

JIM (*puzzled*): This night ?

MRS. KENTISH: Yes. He was gentle and . . . he asked me to forgive him; the last thing he'd ever ask of me, he said. And I spoke harshly to him and told him to come out of the shadows. But he couldn't, he couldn't; for it's to the shadows he belongs.

JIM: Don't, Mother, don't think such things. This has been a night of storm and death; but it's over now; it isn't night any longer. (*He strides to the window and flings wide the heavy curtains. Instantly the room is flooded by the sunlight that pours in.*) See ! It's day ! (*He goes to the door back L. and flings it open.*) There, let the morning wind blow in and drive out those dark shadows of yours. See, they've gone ! And the sun is shining ? Come and look at it, Mother.

[*She does not move.*]

The smoke's beginning to come out of the cottage chimneys and down by the harbour the men are spreading the nets to dry. The doors are opening and the children are running out into the street; and right over there, on the side of the headland, there's a field of yellow corn. Come and look !  
(*He turns and sees her sitting still and silent.*) Mother ! Mother, don't look like that !

MRS. KENTISH (*her lips scarcely moving, her eyes gazing towards the kitchen*) : There was something he wanted to say to me.

JIM (*afraid*) : Mother !

[*He is now kneeling beside her.*]

MRS. KENTISH : Something he wanted to tell me.

CURTAIN



Allan Monkhouse

THE GRAND CHAM'S DIAMOND

*A Play*

## CHARACTERS

MRS. PERKINS

MR. PERKINS

MISS PERKINS

A MAN IN BLACK

ALBERT WATKINS

*This play was first produced at the BIRMINGHAM REPERTORY THEATRE on September 21st, 1918, by MR. JOHN DRINKWATER, with the following cast:*

<i>Mrs. Perkins</i>	—	—	—	—	CATHLEEN ORFORD
<i>Mr. Perkins</i>	—	—	—	—	REGINALD GATTY
<i>Miss Perkins</i>	—	—	—	—	SIDNEY LEON
<i>A Man in Black</i>	—	—	—	—	NOEL SHAMMON
<i>Albert Watkins</i>	—	—	—	—	J. ADRIAN BYRNE

SCENE: *A sitting-room in a small house in a London suburb. The window is in the wall to the left of the spectator and the door in the right half of the back wall. The furniture is ordinary. On the chimneypiece, to the right of the spectator, is a clock. The room is lit by electric light. It is some time after the evening meal. MR. PERKINS is reading a newspaper. MRS. PERKINS is darning a sock, and MISS PERKINS is engaged upon a jigsaw puzzle.*

MRS. PERKINS: What I mean t' say is that it's not much fun for us.

MR. PERKINS: All right, Ma.

MISS PERKINS (*engaged on her puzzle*): Bother !

MRS. PERKINS: It makes a long evenin' of it. Same every night. We 'ave our tea and then we just set down till it's time to go to bed. It's not fair.

MR. PERKINS: Same for all of us.

MRS. PERKINS: That it's not.

MR. PERKINS: Why isn't it ?

MRS. PERKINS: Do y' or do y' not go out o' this 'ouse every mornin' and spend the day out ?

MR. PERKINS: It'd be a poor job for you if I didn't.

MRS. PERKINS: I don't say anythin' about that. I don't interfere.

MR. PERKINS: 'Ow could y' interfere ?

MISS PERKINS: Bother !

MRS. PERKINS: Don't interrup' like that when me and your pa's talkin', Polly.

MISS PERKINS: My name isn't Polly.

MR. PERKINS: What is it ?

MISS PERKINS: It's Marie.

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All applications for permission to perform this play must be addressed to Messrs. Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, London, W.C.2; or, in Canada and U.S.A., to The Baker International Play Bureau, 178 Tremont Street, Boston, Mass., or 448 South Hill Street, Los Angeles.

The play is published by Messrs. Gowans and Gray, Ltd., at 1s. net, and may be obtained from Messrs. Samuel French.

MR. PERKINS: Well, I'm blown !

MRS. PERKINS: An' why shouldn't she 'ave a bit of a change ? She's tired of bein' Polly.

MISS PERKINS: I do think we might have a little more change.

MR. PERKINS: Don't you start.

MISS PERKINS: We might have gone out to the pictures to-night, as Mother said.

MR. PERKINS: Your young man might 'ave come and found you out.

MISS PERKINS: You know he's engaged in the evenings.

MR. PERKINS: Yes, and what at ?

MISS PERKINS: Never mind !

MRS. PERKINS: I do think, Polly, that he ought to be a bit more open with you. What *does* he do ?

MR. PERKINS: Ay; what does Albert Watkins do ?

MISS PERKINS: Never you mind !

MRS. PERKINS: 'E's never told 'er.

MR. PERKINS: I 'ope it's nothin' to be ashamed of.

MISS PERKINS: P'raps I know more than you think.

MRS. PERKINS: 'As 'e said ?

MISS PERKINS: It's confidential.

MR. PERKINS: Oh ! I know that tale.

MRS. PERKINS: Well, Polly's got 'er young man and you've got your business an' out all day seein' people. What 'ave I got ?

MR. PERKINS: Well, what should y' 'ave ? What does any woman 'ave ? I dunno what you're botherin' about. Y' 'ad a week at Margate this year.

MRS. PERKINS (*derisively*): 'Ome from 'ome !

MR. PERKINS: A good woman ought to like 'er 'ome.

MRS. PERKINS: I never said I didn't like it.

MR. PERKINS: Well——

MRS. PERKINS: 'Ome's a place to come back to.

MISS PERKINS: Mother's romantic. That's what she is.

MRS. PERKINS: What *is* that, Polly? It's a word I never rightly——

MR. PERKINS: Romantic! At 'er age!

MRS. PERKINS: You know what it is, do y'?

MR. PERKINS: It's penny dreadfuls and the pictures and gassin' about love and the deep blue sea.

MRS. PERKINS: Well, y' might do worse.

MR. PERKINS: Whatever's come over 'er?

MRS. PERKINS: I've always thought I should like to travel.

MISS PERKINS (*at her puzzle*): I think there's a bit missing.

MRS. PERKINS: Eh? A bit missin'? That's the way with me; there's always bin a bit missin'.

MR. PERKINS: I dunno why y're startin' like this now. Y've 'ad all these years to settle down in. What's come over yer?

MRS. PERKINS: Eh! Don't ask me. I think 'er Albert's comin' about 'as unsettled me.

MISS PERKINS: Albert!

MRS. PERKINS: Well, I see 'im an' you and I think what might 'a' been.

MR. PERKINS: What's that?

MRS. PERKINS: Well, I was young onct.

MR. PERKINS: But y're not now.

MRS. PERKINS: You've no call to throw it in m' teeth.

MR. PERKINS: Teeth indeed!

MRS. PERKINS: Don't be insultin', Mr. Perkins.

MR. PERKINS: I wasn't bein'.

MRS. PERKINS: Yes, y' was.

MISS PERKINS: I don't see why Albert should unsettle you.

MRS. PERKINS: If I was you I'd want to know 'ow 'e spends 'is evenings.

MISS PERKINS: It's no business of yours, Ma.

MR. PERKINS: It'll be some bus'ness of mine. I think it's about time Albert spoke to me.



MISS PERKINS: Spoke to you ?

MR. PERKINS: Placed 'is position an' prospects before me.

MISS PERKINS: Well, I believe he's a confidential agent.

MRS. PERKINS: A what !

MR. PERKINS: What sort of a' agent ?

MISS PERKINS: It's confidential—or financial p'raps.

MR. PERKINS: He's kiddin' yer.

MRS. PERKINS: Do they work at night ?

MISS PERKINS: I've always understood that Rothschilds and people like that did this business at parties—on the quiet.

MR. PERKINS: Bosh !

MISS PERKINS: Oh, very well, Pa.

[MISS PERKINS settles to her puzzle. MRS. PERKINS darns stolidly. MR. PERKINS returns to the paper. A short pause.]

MRS. PERKINS: Well, it's too late for the movies now.

MISS PERKINS: Ah ! That's it.

[She finds the missing bit.]

MRS. PERKINS: What's in the paper, Pa ?

MR. PERKINS: There's a Cabinet crisis.

MRS. PERKINS: Isn't there anythin' interestin' ?

MR. PERKINS: 'Ere's a child stole a shillin' an' swallowed it t' escape detection.

MRS. PERKINS: Poor thing !

MR. PERKINS: 'Ere ! Is this more in your line ? Great Jewel Robbery ! The Grand Cham's Diamond missing.

MRS. PERKINS: Eh ! What's that ?

MISS PERKINS: Who is the Grand Cham ?

MR. PERKINS: 'E's—one o' them Eastern potentates. 'E's been stayin' at the Majestic Hotel. The dimond was taken out of the settin' and a walnut substituted.

MRS. PERKINS: A walnut ! It must be a whopper.

MISS PERKINS: Why did they substitute a walnut ?

MR. PERKINS: You must substitute somethin'.

MISS PERKINS: Why ?

MR. PERKINS: I don't know. They always do. The brightest treasure of the East. Not the slightest trace. Supposed Asiatic gang. Sherlock Holmes and Father Brown have been summoned and a telegram despatched to Mossier Lecock.

MRS. PERKINS (*with satisfaction*): Well, that's somethin' like.

MISS PERKINS: What's it worth?

MR. PERKINS: Eh! I dunno. Thousands, thousands. They say it makes the Koh-i-noor take a back seat.

MRS. PERKINS: Reelly?

MR. PERKINS: What 'ud you do, old lady, if I brought it 'ome for y'r birthday?

MRS. PERKINS: Well, I'd wear it, I s'pose.

MISS PERKINS: You'd never dare, Ma.

MRS. PERKINS: I would that.

MISS PERKINS: But thieves'd always be after it.

MRS. PERKINS: What 'd these thieves do with it when they've got it?

MR. PERKINS: I s'pose they chop it up and sell it in bits.

MRS. PERKINS: What a shame!

MR. PERKINS: I dessay they're off to South America.

MRS. PERKINS: Why?

MR. PERKINS: No extryditation.

MRS. PERKINS: What's that? D' y' mean last 'dition extra?

MISS PERKINS: No, Ma. It means that thieves can't be turned out.

MRS. PERKINS: Why not?

MR. PERKINS: It's like it used to be with slaves here. Once the South American flag's waved over 'em, they're all right.

MISS PERKINS: It isn't all one country there, Pa.

MR. PERKINS: Well, I reckon they're much of a muchness.

MRS. PERKINS: An' could you sell it there?

MR. PERKINS: Yes, they're great people for jewl'ry.

MRS. PERKINS: Polly, you're doin' nothin'. Y' might as well be mendin' that blind.

MISS PERKINS: Oh, bother !

MRS. PERKINS: It looks bad hangin' down like that.

MISS PERKINS (*going towards the window*): People'll see in.

MRS. PERKINS: There's not many passin' at this time o' night.

MISS PERKINS: It makes it so public. (*She takes the blind from the lower part of the window and begins to mend it.*) Where's the white thread, Ma ?

MRS. PERKINS: Here y' are. Now, make a job of it.

[MR. PERKINS *has returned to his paper, his daughter is more or less intent on her work, MRS. PERKINS darns and yawns. MR. PERKINS snores gently.*

MRS. PERKINS: Might as well all be asleep.

MISS PERKINS: Listen, Ma !

MRS. PERKINS: Somebody runnin'. Seem in an 'urry.

[*Something crashes through the window and falls with broken glass upon the floor.*

MISS PERKINS: Good gracious !

MRS. PERKINS: Mercy on us !

MR. PERKINS (*waking up*): Fire ! Where is it ?

MRS. PERKINS: Nonsense, Pa ! It's them boys. Out arter 'em.

MR. PERKINS: What ! Where ?

MISS PERKINS: No. Don't go. Don't leave us. It can't be boys.

MR. PERKINS (*seeing the broken window*): This is very careless, Polly.

MISS PERKINS: It wasn't me. It's a stone, I think.

MRS. PERKINS: They're far enough now. Where is it ?

MISS PERKINS: I'm all of a tremble.

MRS. PERKINS: You ought to 'ave run right out, Pa, and you might 'ave caught 'em. I never did see such a thing.

MR. PERKINS: It's an outrage, this is. Did y' see anybody ?

MRS. PERKINS: We 'eard somebody runnin'.

MISS PERKINS: I thought I 'eard somebody passing after that. Quietly like. Runnin' very light.

MR. PERKINS: Nonsense, Polly. Better put that blind up now.

MISS PERKINS: You put it up.

MR. PERKINS: Do as I tell you.

MISS PERKINS: I don't like.

MRS. PERKINS: 'Ere, 'ere. Give it me.

*[She puts it up and peers out into the street.]*

MISS PERKINS: Come away, Ma.

MR. PERKINS: Where's the stone?

*[They all look about the floor.]*

MISS PERKINS: Here it is. Here's something. *(She picks it up.)* Why! it's a lump of glass.

MR. PERKINS: Let's look!

MRS. PERKINS: Let me see.

*[They crowd round.]*

MR. PERKINS: I say!

MISS PERKINS: What is it? What is it?

MRS. PERKINS: Give it me, Polly.

*[She grabs it.]*

MR. PERKINS: Hold it up to the light.

MISS PERKINS: Why! What can it be?

MRS. PERKINS *(relinquishing it to her husband)*: Nonsense! Nonsense!

*[She goes back to her chair and begins to fumble with her darning. She is greatly agitated.]*

MR. PERKINS: It's a rum thing, this is.

MISS PERKINS: Eh! Isn't it beautiful?

MR. PERKINS: It might be a——

MISS PERKINS: Diamond?

MR. PERKINS: Nonsense!

MRS. PERKINS *(rushing forward)*: Hide it!

*[She seizes the diamond and looks about the room.]*

MISS PERKINS: Why! What d' y' mean, Ma?

MRS. PERKINS: It's it.

MR. PERKINS (*feebly*): What's it?

MRS. PERKINS: You know.

MR. PERKINS: What—what—what rubbish! The idea!

MRS. PERKINS (*looking at it in her palm*): It's the Grand Cham's dimond.

MR. PERKINS: Then it's dangerous.

MRS. PERKINS: Never mind that.

MISS PERKINS: What shall we do?

*[She begins to whimper.]*

MRS. PERKINS: Stop that, Polly.

MR. PERKINS: P'raps we'd better look out for a policeman.

MRS. PERKINS: No.

MR. PERKINS: If it is it we're not safe.

MRS. PERKINS: I don't care.

MR. PERKINS: But what d' y' want to do?

MRS. PERKINS: Here! Let's put it inside the clock. (*She opens the back of the clock and crams it in.*) Now!

MR. PERKINS: What are y' up to, Ma?

MISS PERKINS: I wish you'd throw it out in the street again.

MRS. PERKINS: No, no.

MR. PERKINS: But what *are* y' up to?

MRS. PERKINS: It's come to us, this 'as. We'll stick to it if we can.

MR. PERKINS: But——

MISS PERKINS: Oh, Ma!

MRS. PERKINS: They may not find the 'ouse again. They're all alike in this street.

MR. PERKINS: There's the broken window.

MRS. PERKINS: Let's 'ave the bits of glass out. Then it won't be noticed.

*[She peers out into the street. Then she begins to pluck the fragments of broken glass from the window. She winces and licks her finger.]*



MR. PERKINS: You've cut yourself now.

MRS. PERKINS: Never mind that. Polly, pick all the bits off the floor. Don't leave a trace.

[*She licks her finger.* POLLY obeys.

MR. PERKINS: Now, what's all this about?

MISS PERKINS (*on the floor*): I dunno what's come over 'er.

MRS. PERKINS: 'Ere, Polly, look alive. 'Ave y' got 'em all?

MISS PERKINS: All I can find.

MRS. PERKINS: Drat it! A bit's fallen outside. Go out and pick it up, Pa. No; p'raps better not.

MR. PERKINS: Look here! What's y'r game?

MRS. PERKINS: Give here! (*She takes all the fragments together and puts them under the sofa cushion. She looks round the room, listens at the window, and returns to her darning.*) If anyone comes, mind we know nothin' about it.

MR. PERKINS: It depends 'oo comes, doesn't it?

MRS. PERKINS: No.

MR. PERKINS: It might be the police.

MRS. PERKINS: Never mind the police.

MR. PERKINS: Why! What d' y' mean? What *do* y' mean?

MRS. PERKINS: It's the chanct of a lifetime. We'll take it.

MISS PERKINS: Oh, Ma!

MR. PERKINS: Look 'ere——

MRS. PERKINS: It's come to us. It might a' bin the answer to a prayer.

MR. PERKINS: Was it?

MRS. PERKINS: Not exactly, but I've been thinkin' a lot.

MR. PERKINS: More likely the devil.

MRS. PERKINS: There's no such thing. Y're talkin' nonsense.

MR. PERKINS: No devil. Then is there God?

MRS. PERKINS: There may be. 'E may 'ave sent it.

MR. PERKINS: It's awful talk, this.

MISS PERKINS: Why! What could you do with it?

MRS. PERKINS: Chop it up and sell it.

MR. PERKINS: Where ?

MRS. PERKINS: In South America.

MR. PERKINS: Good 'eavens !

MISS PERKINS: Ma, how can you ?

MR. PERKINS: 'Ave y' took leave of y'r senses ?

MRS. PERKINS: Yes, if y' like.

MR. PERKINS: Well, I've 'eard tell as women aren't honest like men and now I know it.

MRS. PERKINS: 'Ow do I know you're honest ?

MR. PERKINS: I've never took a thing in my life. I've a record, 'aven't I ?

MRS. PERKINS: I dessay. I dunno. I won't give it up. I won't. I won't. So there !

MR. PERKINS: 'Ow can y' 'elp it ?

MRS. PERKINS: I've sat there darnin' and mendin', waitin' and dozin' till I'm tired. I've never 'ad a go at anythin'. The chanc't 'as come.

MISS PERKINS: I did think you were honest, Ma.

MRS. PERKINS: Honest ! It's ours.

MR. PERKINS: 'Ow can it be ?

MRS. PERKINS: 'Oo's is it ?

MR. PERKINS: Why ! That Grand Cham's.

MRS. PERKINS: An' 'ow did 'e get it ? 'E's a tyrant. 'E stole it off some nigger. Now it's come to me. It's mine. It's mine as much as anyone's. It's come like a miracle.

MISS PERKINS: But you can't keep it.

MR. PERKINS: Y'r ma amazes me.

MRS. PERKINS: First thing in the mornin' y'll get a list o' them ships sailin' for South America.

MISS PERKINS: Oh, Ma ! Ma !

MR. PERKINS: She's off 'er chump.

MRS. PERKINS: I'll go alone if y' like.

MR. PERKINS: It's dangerous. It's dangerous. There may be a revolver levelled at y' now.

MRS. PERKINS: I don't care.

MR. PERKINS: I never knew she was like this.

MISS PERKINS: South America? Where?

MRS. PERKINS: Y' shall 'ave jewels and dresses no end, Polly.

MISS PERKINS: Don't, Ma.

MR. PERKINS: South America! Like that chap, Jabez Balfour.

MISS PERKINS: He was brought back, wasn't he?

MR. PERKINS: I object to be put along of 'im, any'ow.

MRS. PERKINS: We'd manage better than that. Riches! Livin' at ease. Motors an' champagne. We've never 'ad a chanct!

MR. PERKINS: It can't be done. It's all nonsense. An' it's 'orrible to think of.

MRS. PERKINS: Oh! It's a beautiful thing. I couldn't bear to break it up. We'll keep it. We'll look at it now and then. Every Sunday.

MR. PERKINS: Sunday!

MRS. PERKINS: I could go on settin' 'ere if I knew it was there all the time. I think I could be 'appy.

MISS PERKINS: You'd never be safe.

MRS. PERKINS: Safe! I've bin too safe.

MR. PERKINS: Oh, missis! Oh, missis!

MISS PERKINS: It's strange nobody's come.

MRS. PERKINS: Nobody's comin'. It's a gift.

MR. PERKINS: It may not be—what y' think.

MRS. PERKINS (*fiercely*): It is.

MR. PERKINS: Then they'll be after us. Police—or worse.

MRS. PERKINS: Let 'em come.

*[There is a ring at the door-bell. They all stand tense.]*

MR. PERKINS: Now, there.

MISS PERKINS: Oh, dear!

MRS. PERKINS: You'll not say a word. You'll do as I tell you. Mind that. We know nothing.

MISS PERKINS: There's the window.

MRS. PERKINS: Leave that to me.

MR. PERKINS: Oh ! But, I say——

MRS. PERKINS: Thomas Perkins, you'll rue it to your dyin' day if——

*[The ring again.]*

MR. PERKINS: Who's goin' ?

MRS. PERKINS: I am. Remember !

*[She goes out.]*

MISS PERKINS: What are we to do, Pa ?

MR. PERKINS: Eh ! I'm beat.

MISS PERKINS: Shall we throw it out of the window ?

MR. PERKINS: No, no. Best not. Humour her a bit. It may be nothin'.

MRS. PERKINS (*outside*): No, you don't. 'Ere. I tell yer——

STRANGER: Excuse me.

MRS. PERKINS: Pa, 'ere's a man forcin' 'is way——

MISS PERKINS: Oh, dear !

MR. PERKINS: Dash it all ! I say !

*[MRS. PERKINS and a dark STRANGER, dressed in black, enter together. She is resisting his advance, but he presses on ruthlessly. As he enters she gives way and changes her tactics.]*

MRS. PERKINS: Well, I must say ! Pushin' a lady about like that ! What bis'ness 'ave y' 'ere ?

STRANGER: I've told you, madam.

MRS. PERKINS: A fine tale ! Y'r boy an' 'is glass marble ! Where is 'e ? I tell yer we know nothin' about it. Do we, Pa ?

*[Behind THE STRANGER, with a terrific frown, she shakes her fist at him.]*

MR. PERKINS (*feebly blustering*): Now what's all this ?

MISS PERKINS: Oh, Ma !

MRS. PERKINS: Shut up !

STRANGER: I'm sorry to intrude, sir, but I've lost something in your room.

MRS. PERKINS: What nonsense ! 'Ow could yer ?

STRANGER: As I have told this lady, my little boy——

MRS. PERKINS: Where is 'e ?

STRANGER (*to* MR. PERKINS): His favourite glass marble. He pretended to throw it. It slipped from his hand and, I am sorry to say, went through your window. I apologise and shall be glad to pay. Please give me the—marble at once. Where is it ? I've no time to lose.

MRS. PERKINS: Where's the boy ?

STRANGER: He's just round the corner.

MRS. PERKINS: D' y' expect us to believe that tale ?

STRANGER (*with a flash of menace*): You'd better. (*To* MR. PERKINS) Now, sir !

MR. PERKINS: It's a bit thick, y' know ; I mean thin.

STRANGER: It will have to do. No trifling. Come !

[*He is looking about the room, having cursorily glanced at the floor. He strides to the window and pulls down the blind.*]

MRS. PERKINS: None o' y'r liberties here. Get out !

MR. PERKINS: 'Ere, y' know ! (*Aside to* MRS. PERKINS) Ma, I don't like it.

STRANGER: The devil ! Where's the glass ?

MRS. PERKINS: What glass ?

STRANGER: The pane's gone. You see ! I knew this was the house.

MRS. PERKINS: That's easy explained.

MISS PERKINS: Oh, Ma ! Tell him and——

MRS. PERKINS: Of course I'll tell 'im. (*She menaces* MISS PERKINS *surreptitiously.*) It's my daughter's new-fangled ideas of ventilation. She would 'ave it so. It's been that way a fortnight. No—let's see—to-day's Tuesday. Nigh on a month.

STRANGER: Damnation ! Where is it ? Where's the diamond ?

MRS. PERKINS (*with a shriek of exultation*): The diamond !

STRANGER: Yes, let me tell you then. Your lives are in danger. You've got the Grand Cham's diamond.



MR. PERKINS: 'Ow did it get 'ere?

STRANGER: The thief was pursued. He threw it in.

MR. PERKINS (*querulously*): Why did 'e throw it in 'ere?

STRANGER: Don't be a fool.

MRS. PERKINS: An' 'oo are you?

STRANGER: I am—the Grand Cham's representative.

MRS. PERKINS: Prove it.

STRANGER: Enough of this.

[*He draws a revolver. MISS PERKINS shrieks. MR. PERKINS recoils and edges away. MRS. PERKINS stands firm.*]

MR. PERKINS: Ma! Ma!

STRANGER (*rapping the butt of the revolver on the table*): Where is it?

MRS. PERKINS: I'll tell yer.

STRANGER: At once.

MRS. PERKINS: I've swallowed it.

STRANGER (*greatly discomposed*): What!

MRS. PERKINS: It went down as easy as a oyster.

STRANGER: Swallowed it! You're joking!

MRS. PERKINS: No. I got the idea out of the evenin' paper. Where is it, Pa? 'Ere. "Child swallows Shillin'. Curious Case."

STRANGER (*to the others*): Is this true?

MISS PERKINS: Oh, I don't know.

MR. PERKINS: Y' see, I was asleep.

STRANGER: Asleep!

MR. PERKINS: Wasn't I, Mother?

MRS. PERKINS: 'E'd sleep through anythin'.

STRANGER: D' you mean to say——? Where is it?

MRS. PERKINS: I've just told yer.

STRANGER: On your oath——

MRS. PERKINS: Oath! D' y' doubt the word of a lady?

STRANGER: Then—d' you feel it—I mean—whereabouts is it now?

MRS. PERKINS: I don't think that's a question a gentleman'd ask.

STRANGER: Kites of hell ! You'll have to be cut open.

MRS. PERKINS: Nay, I won't.

STRANGER (*to himself*): Cremation ? Would it melt the diamond ?

MRS. PERKINS: I won't be cremated. There ! Y' 've to get the deceased's consent. I'm goin' to be buried when my time comes.

STRANGER (*pacing about in agitation while MRS. PERKINS controls the others by nods and winks*): What's to be done ? An emetic ?

MRS. PERKINS: You'd better go 'ome an' say it's lost.

STRANGER: Unhappy woman ! Do you understand that your life is a trifle, a pawn in the game ?

MRS. PERKINS: Pawn ! Yes, an' y' can't get it out without the ticket.

STRANGER: It's impossible. It can't be. (*He turns on the others.*) The truth ! Did she swallow it ? If she did, she dies.

MISS PERKINS: Oh, no, no. She didn't.

MRS. PERKINS: You silly !

MISS PERKINS: Oh, Ma !

MR. PERKINS: Ma, Ma, what can we do ?

MRS. PERKINS: Y' can 'old y'r tongues. Y're no 'elp at all.

STRANGER: What folly this is ! What can you do with it ? That diamond means death to you. Death ! Destruction ! You haven't a chance of keeping it. You're mad. Your lives now are not worth a minute's purchase.

MISS PERKINS: Give it up, Ma. I'll tell you where it is. It's——

MRS. PERKINS (*in a terrible voice*): Stop !

MR. PERKINS: What can you do, Ma ? Chuck it ! Chuck it !

MRS. PERKINS: 'E don't bluff me. 'E's in a great 'urry. I believe 'e's the thief.

STRANGER: Thousand devils ! We're wasting time. (*H looks at the clock and then plucks out his watch.*) Your clock's slow. It's stopped. It was that time when I came in.

MISS PERKINS: Tell him. Tell him.

MR. PERKINS: Oh, chuck it !

STRANGER (*perceiving that he is getting "warm"*): What stopped the clock ?

MISS PERKINS (*hysterically*): Give it 'im.

MRS. PERKINS: Polly, I'm ashamed of yer.

[*A face appears at the window, but they do not see it.*]

STRANGER: Is it there ?

[*He makes for the clock, and MRS. PERKINS throws herself in front.*]

MRS. PERKINS: No, it's not; and y' shan't meddle with my furniture.

STRANGER (*pointing the revolver at her*): Move aside !

MRS. PERKINS: Move aside yerself.

STRANGER (*he hesitates, then turns the revolver on MISS PERKINS*): Is it there ? Quick !

[*MISS PERKINS shrieks, a hand with a revolver in it is thrust through the empty pane, the revolver is fired, THE STRANGER drops his, stamps, curses, and wrings his hands. A man opens the window-sash and springs into the room.*]

MISS PERKINS: Albert !

MRS. PERKINS: What ! It's Albert.

[*THE STRANGER rushes to the switch and turns off the light. Darkness, shouting, and confusion. The light is turned on. The furniture is disarranged, THE STRANGER and the clock have gone, the others are distributed about the room, MRS. PERKINS sitting in the chair she first occupied.*]

ALBERT: Who's got it ?

MR. PERKINS: He's gone.

MISS PERKINS: Oh ! Albert !

ALBERT: Where's the diamond ?

MR. PERKINS: It was in the clock.

ALBERT: The clock? Where is it?

MISS PERKINS: Oh! Albert!

MR. PERKINS: 'E's taken it. 'E's got the clock.

MRS. PERKINS: Nay, 'e 'asn't.

*[She produces the clock from under her petticoats.]*

MR. PERKINS: Well, I'm blowed!

MISS PERKINS: Oh, Ma!

ALBERT: What is it? Have you got it?

MRS. PERKINS: I've got it right enough.

*[She carries the clock to the chimneypiece, opens it, and takes out the diamond.]*

Will that gentleman come back?

ALBERT: No, he won't.

MRS. PERKINS: How d' y' know?

ALBERT: I know.

MRS. PERKINS: Polly, just put that blind back, will yer?  
I don't like bein' too public.

MISS PERKINS: Oh! I daren't.

ALBERT: Now, ma'am, give it to me.

MRS. PERKINS: Eh?

ALBERT: Let's have it. Quick.

MRS. PERKINS: Where d' you come in, Albert?

ALBERT: Come on. This'll be the making o' me.

MRS. PERKINS: O' me too, I 'ope. But 'adn't we all better  
be movin'?

MISS PERKINS: Where to, Ma?

MRS. PERKINS: Out at the back door. Pack a few things in  
a bag.

ALBERT: What are y' up to? Wha' d' y' mean?

MRS. PERKINS: Now, Albert, there's no time to make  
explanations. We're all in at this, aren't we?

ALBERT: Well—in a way. But look here—

MRS. PERKINS: South America's the place, isn't it? D' y'  
know anythin' o' the sailin's? Or 'ad we better cross to  
France? Better take the midnight train somewhere.

ALBERT: Has she gone dotty?

MRS. PERKINS: Y're all asleep. Come on, Polly. A few things in a bag. Now, Pa. Better put this light out p'raps. Is the front door shut? Look at the time-table, Pa.

*[She is making for the door when ALBERT intercepts her.]*

ALBERT: Give me the diamond. I dunno what y're talkin' about.

MRS. PERKINS: Nay, I stick to this.

ALBERT: You can't! What nonsense! Give it here! This job's the making o' me. Let's have it.

MRS. PERKINS: Nay, it's mine an' I'll stick to it.

ALBERT: Yours!

MRS. PERKINS: Yes. Dimonds like this belongs to them as can get 'em. Nobody's honest with things like this. I got it an' y' shall all share. But it's mine. It's mine. Eh! It's a beauty. I'd stick to this if all the p'lice in London was after me.

ALBERT: Y'd do what?

MRS. PERKINS: Ay, an' Scotland Yard too.

ALBERT: Bah! I'm Scotland Yard.

MRS. PERKINS: What!

MISS PERKINS: Oh! Albert!

ALBERT: Didn't y' know? Didn't y' guess? Didn't y' understand? What did y' take me for?

MRS. PERKINS: D' y' mean to say——?

ALBERT: I mean t' say it's 'igh time I was on my way back with this dimond. The gang's all rounded up by this time.

MISS PERKINS: The gang?

MR. PERKINS: That feller was one of 'em, then? Where is he?

ALBERT: He was copped when he left 'ere. Y' didn't know y'r 'ouse was surrounded.

MRS. PERKINS: But 'ow did the dimond come 'ere? 'Oo threw it in?

ALBERT: I did.



MISS PERKINS: You !

MR. PERKINS: You did !

ALBERT: I did that.

MR. PERKINS: Why ?

ALBERT: Becos they were after me. I was a dead man if I stuck to it then. I threw it in 'ere to gain time and knowin' the 'ouse.

MISS PERKINS: Well, I never !

ALBERT: They're a desp'rate lot.

MR. PERKINS: It's all most unusual. Never since I've been an 'ouse'older 'ave I——

MISS PERKINS: Oh, Albert ! You might 'ave told me.

ALBERT: I 'ad my reasons.

MRS. PERKINS: Y're a detective, then ?

ALBERT: I am that. So let's 'ave it. I tell yer I must be off.

MRS. PERKINS (*holding up the diamond, but away from him*): Look at it, Albert !

ALBERT: I see it.

MRS. PERKINS: Can y' be honest ? Look at it !

ALBERT: She's off 'er chump.

MR. PERKINS: She doesn't reelly mean it. I've borne a 'igh character all my life.

MRS. PERKINS (*passionately*): It's *my* dimond.

MISS PERKINS: I'm ashamed of my ma.

MR. PERKINS: My employers 'as always put the utmost confidence in me.

ALBERT: What's she up to ? Now, ma'am, you'll just 'and that over or——

MRS. PERKINS: Or ?

ALBERT (*he produces a whistle*): I wouldn't 'andle yer myself.

MRS. PERKINS: That's it, is it ?

ALBERT: That's it.

MRS. PERKINS: Then let it go the way it came.

[*She throws it through the window.*]

MR. PERKINS: 'Old on. There's another pane gone !

ALBERT: O 'ell !

*[He rushes out.]*

MISS PERKINS: You'll ruin us, Ma.

MRS. PERKINS (*dusting one hand against the other*): A good shuttance.

MISS PERKINS (*at the window*): Oh ! I hope he'll find it. There he is, and a policeman's with him. They've got it, I think. Yes. Albert, Albert ! I wish he'd look up. They're seeing if it's damaged. There ! He's waved his hand.

MRS. PERKINS (*she has settled into her chair*): Well, we've 'ad quite a busy evenin'.

MISS PERKINS: I don't know what Albert'll think of you.

MRS. PERKINS: 'E's not going to marry me, thank 'eaven.

MR. PERKINS: D' y' want t' know what *I* think of yer ?

MRS. PERKINS: Go on ! Y've no 'mageration.

MISS PERKINS: I never thought to be ashamed of my own mother.

MR. PERKINS: Wantin' in the very el'ments of morality. I wonder 'ow Sossiety'd get on if they was all like you.

MRS. PERKINS: Polly, put up that blind. It's a bit chilly with them broken panes.

MISS PERKINS: Most unladylike as well.

*[They settle down into their chairs again. MRS. PERKINS takes up her darning and MR. PERKINS the paper. After putting up the blind MISS PERKINS returns to her puzzle.]*

MRS. PERKINS: 'Ow much did y' say it was worth, Pa ?

MR. PERKINS (*gruffly*): Never mind.

MRS. PERKINS: Well, I 'ad my bit o' fun for onct.

CURTAIN

T. B. Morris

GILD THE MASK AGAIN

*A Play*

# FOR MADOLINE THOMAS AND HER PLAYERS

## CHARACTERS

ELIZABETH, QUEEN OF ENGLAND

THE COUNTESS OF NOTTINGHAM

LADY PHILADELPHIA SCROPE

MARY RADCLIFFE – lady in waiting

MARY FITTON

ELIZABETH SOUTHWELL

CORDALL ONSLOWE

FRANCES MARYAT – a child

TWO PAGES

} Sisters, cousins of the  
Queen and ladies in  
waiting

} maids of honour

SCENE: A room at Whitehall on the morning of Wednesday, February 25th, 1601.

A curtain setting may be used, either with door arches and a window frame representing stone, or with simple openings. Entrances are backstage towards R., downstage R., and C. L. Upstage R. is a window, preferably with narrow, unglazed openings set deep in the wall. The back part of the stage is raised by several steps above the level of the front portion. On the higher level, towards L., is a large, throne-like chair, set obliquely so that it faces downstage R., with a footstool. Before the window is a long chest on which lies a scabbardless sword. There is an oak stool against the R. wall on the lower level, and an oak bench somewhere downstage, L. Over the backstage entrance is a shield bearing the lilies and lions of France and England. Other furnishings, tapestries, etc., as desired, but a rich severity of effect should be attempted, in order that the setting may enhance by contrast the elaborate dresses of the ladies.

As the curtain rises the COUNTESS OF NOTTINGHAM is standing C. She is a stately, ageing lady, her features somewhat resembling those of THE QUEEN. She stands stiffly, facing downstage, waiting for someone, once giving a quick, cautious glance about her. Almost immediately THE FIRST PAGE enters downstage R., hurriedly, in the manner of a conspirator. He bows low to NOTTINGHAM, who remains rigid, not looking at him.

FIRST PAGE: Milady sent for me.

NOTTINGHAM (*coldly*): You have a message from the Earl of Essex, which you are waiting to deliver.

FIRST PAGE: To be given into the hands of Lady Scrope——

NOTTINGHAM: My sister. Well, deliver it to me, and I will see that she has it.

FIRST PAGE (*nervously*): Your pardon, milady—my instructions were explicit——

NOTTINGHAM: You heard me.

[THE FIRST PAGE *hesitates*. NOTTINGHAM *swings round to face him*.

Come ! I have not all day to waste. You know me.

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Applications for permission to perform this play should be made to Theatrecraft, Ltd., 35 Paternoster Row, London, E.C. 4 ; or, for Canada and the U.S.A., to the Baker International Play Bureau, 178 Tremont Street, Boston, Mass., or 448 South Hill Street, Los Angeles.



FIRST PAGE: You are the Countess of Nottingham—*(significantly)* no friend to milord of Essex.

NOTTINGHAM *(coolly)*: In an hour Essex's head will be off his body. Do you wish to cling to a dead traitor, a shattered cause?

FIRST PAGE: Milady, I—— *(Hesitates.)*

NOTTINGHAM: Perchance you wish to go to the block with Essex?

*[Pause. THE FIRST PAGE gives way.]*

FIRST PAGE: There was no message—only this, to be given to Her Majesty by Lady Scrope.

*[He produces a ring, wrapped in a piece of silk. NOTTINGHAM snatches it from him and examines it.]*

NOTTINGHAM *(excitedly)*: Her ring! *(Controlling herself, speaking curtly)* Mark me! you will forget this. A word to anyone, and I denounce you as his follower. *(Significantly)* Your neck is too pretty to be hacked by a clumsy axe. . . . You understand?

FIRST PAGE *(scared)*: I understand, milady.

*[NOTTINGHAM takes no further notice of him. She puts the ring in her bodice and goes off stiffly backstage. THE FIRST PAGE watches her, concerned, then sits on the bench downstage L. in gloomy thought.]*

There goes the last chance of milord of Essex. . . . But what could I do? . . .

*[He breaks off as FRANCES MARYAT, a pretty child, enters C. L., looking curiously at him.]*

FRANCES: Good morning! Are you waiting for someone?

FIRST PAGE *(sulkily)*: No. Resting.

FRANCES: Oh, do you rest at this time of the morning?

*[There is no reply, so FRANCES forgets THE FIRST PAGE and moves curiously up to the dais, takes up the sword, and puts it down quickly with a little shiver. Then she goes to THE QUEEN's chair, hesitates, dares greatly, and sits in it, imagining herself the Queen of England. THE SECOND PAGE enters downstage R. FRANCES, now having imagined away all her hesitation, points at him.]*

I'm the Queen! I order you instant execution.

FIRST PAGE (*startled from his gloomy thoughts, springing to his feet*): Execution ! (*Seeing FRANCES*) Ah, you hussy !

SECOND PAGE (*laughing*): Come out of the Queen's chair, Mistress Mischief, or you'll be the one to lose your head.

[FRANCES *laughs*. THE PAGES *take no further notice of her*, THE SECOND *speaking to* THE FIRST.

Well, the great Earl of Essex will soon be paying for his pride. . . . Don't suppose he's feeling very great just now. . . .

[*Cheerfully, not noticing that* THE FIRST PAGE *is not appreciating his discourse*.

Our headsmen are never properly trained, if you ask me. Butchers—more often than not they bungle things. Makes it hard for a man to die with dignity—

FIRST PAGE (*reacting*): Pest on you ! Don't talk about it !

SECOND PAGE (*surprised*): Marry, what ails you ? One would think you were Essex yourself.

[THE FIRST PAGE *uneasily feels the back of his neck*. THE SECOND PAGE *continues, curiously*.

They'll fire a gun from the Tower, I suppose, as his head rolls off ? (*Laughing*) Oh, yours is tight enough—at present.

FIRST PAGE (*bitterly*): Yes—they'll fire a gun. And you'll hear it here—the wind is right. That will please you, I suppose. Next best thing to seeing—

[LADY PHILADELPHIA SCROPE, *who, like her sister, has grown old in THE QUEEN's service, but is kindlier, enters C. L., speaking eagerly to* THE FIRST PAGE.

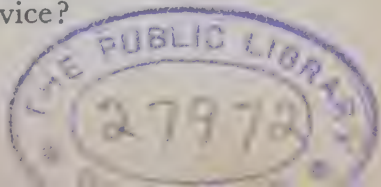
SCROPE: Ah ! You have come with a message for me ?

FIRST PAGE (*bowing to hide his hesitation*): No, milady.

SCROPE (*surprised*): You have not ? But I thought—I expected— (*Anxiously*) You know me, do you not ? I am Lady Scrope. . . . Surely you come from the Earl of Essex ?

FIRST PAGE: I come but to seek favour of the Queen. I—have no message from milord of Essex.

SCROPE: I cannot understand. (*Moving downstage, speaking as if to herself*) Essex has always been a fool—but surely even he would not be so great a fool as this. (*To* THE FIRST PAGE *again, urgently*) You are in his service ?



FIRST PAGE: I was. I am not now.

SCROPE: Yet you can gain access to him. Go to him, now—quickly!—and beg him not to neglect his one hope of life. He will understand.

[THE FIRST PAGE is desperate, anxious only to get away.

MARY FITTON,\* a young and very lovely brunette; enters C. L.

It is not right that a man should die because of his pride.

FITTON (*easily*): Milord of Essex is dying for something other than *his own* pride.

SCROPE (*ignoring her, to THE FIRST PAGE*): You will go swiftly?

[THE FIRST PAGE bows without answering, turns, and strides off downstage R.

FITTON: He will go—but I do not think he will return.

SCROPE: Why do you say that?

FITTON: Oh, something in his look.

SECOND PAGE (*cheekily*): And Mistress Fitton is used to reading men's looks.

SCROPE: If I were her, I'd not boast of it—especially to-day. (*Directly to FITTON*) Her Majesty looks with no favour upon your love affairs.

FITTON (*lightly*): And, as Her Majesty is losing her last lover—her *last* lover—to-day, she's like to be more jealous even than usual, you would say?

[SCROPE turns her back on FITTON. ELIZABETH SOUTHWELL and CORDALL ONSLOWE, both young girls, enter C. L.

SOUTHWELL (*pointing to FRANCES, who is still gravely sitting in the Queen's chair*): Why! Look at that! The little baggage!

[SOUTHWELL laughs, runs upstage to the chair, and picks up FRANCES, who protests, laughing.

FRANCES: I want to be Queen.

\* Supposed by some to have been Shakespeare's "Dark Lady of the Sonnets." She was disgraced as the result of a love affair with Lord Herbert, son of the Earl of Pembroke, who has some claim to the position of "Mr. W. H."

ONSLowe (*seriously*): I can imagine no one I had less will to be—to-day.

[SOUTHWELL *kisses* FRANCES, *carrying her downstage*.

SECOND PAGE: The Queen is well enough. She's taking a right royal revenge. (*Laughing*) It isn't every woman who can behead a reluctant lover.

SCROPE (*horrified*): Be quiet, boy!

SOUTHWELL (*thoughtfully*): Revenge? . . . No.

SECOND PAGE: Yes. Do you suppose Essex is really going to the block for treason?

ONSLowe: What else—in the Queen's lover?

SECOND PAGE: Were he truly her lover he'd not die—though he were rotten as a ripe medlar with his treason. . . . No, Mistress Fitton knows better than that.

[THE SECOND PAGE *attempts to put his arm about* FITTON, *who boxes his ears*.

A pest on't! All women are termagants!

FITTON (*crisply*): All men are faithless. And all beardless youths are most objectionable, being neither young enough for innocence nor old enough for experience.

[THE SECOND PAGE *reacts, and stalks off indignantly downstage R*. FITTON, SOUTHWELL and ONSLOWE *laugh*.

SCROPE (*reprovingly*): Mistress Fitton!

FITTON (*disregarding her*): But upon this matter of milord of Essex—he will die to-day, not because of his o'er-weening pride, not because he bungled the Irish campaign and led his pitiful rebellion, not even because he once dared turn his back upon the Queen——

SCROPE: S'sh!

FITTON: But because he was fool enough to thrust into the Queen's presence, into her very bedroom, when she was (*a peal of laughter, in which SOUTHWELL and ONSLOWE join*) too absolutely herself—without even her wig.

SCROPE: Oh, have you no heart? No pity?

[FITTON *shrugs, laughs and moves upstage, turning and speaking from the daïs, the others looking up to her*, SCROPE *over R.*, and SOUTHWELL, ONSLOWE and FRANCES *downstage L*.



FITTON (*seriously*):

Why should I pity her? . . .

She has had her day, golden, golden and long,  
 Doubling the parts of woman and of Queen  
 At her least whim; catching magnificence  
 In her two greedy hands; riches and glory,  
 A people's adulation—as to near-goddess  
 Rather than woman; all the pomp and pride  
 Attending Royal England, and the homage  
 Of the most puissant princes of the earth. . . .  
 All to her hands, like precious gems, slow-dropped  
 By some celestial jeweller, who has paused  
 His labours for the gods, in a strange dotage  
 Upon a daughter of earth.

SCROPE (*sadly*):

What she has had

Of a glorious day i' the past, gives nothing now  
 But a night more bleak, and a darker sky——

SOUTHWELL:

And pity

Comes quickly to the heart, in thought of her  
 And her colossal loneliness——

ONSLOWE:

Our youth

Cannot throw out to her length of age, to see  
 What of horror may spring from the deeper dark of  
 her mind.

FITTON:

So you would weep? . . . She will not thank the tears  
 That fall for her, nor the utterance of your sighs.

She will not brook compassion—Harry's daughter—  
 no.

She will demand—as ever—more, far more than a  
 facile grief;

She will demand

Our lives, loves, warmth of blood, our ever-constant  
 offering

To her unparalleled pride. . . . She as a goddess,  
 We—her unwilling vestals.

SCROPE:

Prithee, take care!

FITTON:

For she is greedy of glory; greedy for words of praise  
 To gild a shell kernelling horror.



SOUTHWELL (*in a horrified whisper*): Listen !

It is the Queen.

Playing—playing the virginals now  
On the day her lover dies.

Is her heart so hard ?  
I had not thought it of her—even of her.

[But FITTON's reaction is different. She admires THE QUEEN's courage.]

But hark ! The air is a gay and gallant mask  
 Drawn in courage over the face of pain. . . .  
 And yet the notes are drop and difficult drop, agony  
 That will, in her despite, force outlet. . . .  
 (*With enthusiasm*) Something is here  
 More beautiful than beauty—a strong driving of will  
 When hope and joy and all good things are dead . . .  
 A little lonely road, with a grave at the end  
 Wellnigh in sight—no more, save memory  
 And an invincible courage. . . . Men who false praise  
 Her raddled ruin of looks, might praise in truth  
 This—greatness—in her.

[FITTON *pauses, unusually moved by her admiration.*

SOUTHWELL: Strange are your words, and  
strange  
The thought they clothe.

ONSLOWE (*curiously*): Where do you find them,  
Mary?  
You—young, haughty, extravagant—worse, maybe—  
[FITTON *laughs*.

Where do you come by them?

SOUTHWELL:

Are you a poet,

Strangely adventuring to ecstasies  
 I' the candle-gleams of nights withdrawn and still,  
 Capturing loveliness to store on cords  
 Of golden thoughts? . . . Or how is this born in you?

ONSLOWE:

You have too much care of your body, methinks, thus  
 to entreatise your mind.

SOUTHWELL:

Keep you, perchance, a poet up your sleeve?

[*A little, expressive pause, then FITTON laughs.*]

FITTON:

Aroint you, gossips! Whatever my sleeve may hide  
 It never bears my heart.

[*Laughter. SCROPE makes an anxious gesture for silence.*  
*FITTON moves downstage to L.*]

SCROPE:

Enough of hearts—of mirth!

We have no hearts of our own—to-day——

SOUTHWELL:

Who comes?

[*All look upstage. MARY RADCLIFFE, who has served THE  
 QUEEN for forty years, enters quickly backstage, moving  
 down, with her finger to her lips.*]

RADCLIFFE: S'sh! A' God's mercy still your laughter to-day  
 —unless she bids you laugh. (*Urgently, to SCROPE*) Why has  
 not Essex returned her ring?

SCROPE: I do not know. I have sent to him.

RADCLIFFE: He had never the tact of Leicester. But—oh!  
 a fine young man—and to die so brutally. . . . (*Desperately*)  
 Oh! is he so proud that he must, even now, try to make her  
 go to *him*?

FITTON (*thoughtfully*): To die because he cannot longer  
 pretend to love a woman near old enough to be his grand-  
 mother. . . . Perhaps he chooses wisely, after all.

SCROPE: Mistress Fitton is full of strange thoughts this  
 morning.

RADCLIFFE: Mistress Fitton had best look to her behaviour

—or she may find herself returned to her father with a flea in her ear.

[FITTON, SOUTHWELL and ONSLOWE laugh.

FITTON: Was your blood never warm when you were young, Mistress Radcliffe?

RADCLIFFE (*significantly*): I did not keep mysterious trysts in the dusk, if that is what you mean.

[FITTON reacts and is silent. At some time during the foregoing, FRANCES has slipped off C. L. NOTTINGHAM enters backstage. SCROPE and RADCLIFFE give her looks of questioning disapproval. They know that her coolness hides satisfaction.

NOTTINGHAM (*aware of their thoughts*): Well—England will sleep the sounder when this business is done.

SCROPE: What? Essex?

NOTTINGHAM: What else? . . . He would have liked to see a crown upon his head—but soon he will lack the where-withal even to set a hat upon.

SCROPE: Sister, you hate Essex, and you glory in his downfall.

NOTTINGHAM (*facing her, unmoved*): Sister, I love England and I glory in the death of a traitor. . . . And 'twere better—for the Queen—that he should die.

RADCLIFFE: I do not think so. She will break her heart of this.

NOTTINGHAM: Not she. Did she break her heart when Leicester died?

[*The music, which has for a moment been louder, stops.*

Listen!

[*All listen tensely, enhancing the silence.*

SCROPE: She has stopped playing.

RADCLIFFE: We must be ready to face her.

SOUTHWELL: What are we to do?

NOTTINGHAM: Treat her as if to-day were nothing more than ordinary.

FITTON: There is never a day in the service of the Queen of England that can be called—ordinary.

RADCLIFFE : S'sh !

[*Pause. Dead silence. QUEEN ELIZABETH enters backstage. She is sixty-seven years of age, extravagantly dressed, be-wigged, painted and loaded with jewels. At the moment she is very quiet, rigid with the control she is exercising upon herself in the matter of Essex, her face a mask. All curtsy low. ELIZABETH stands for a moment silently, looking straight before her, her thoughts elsewhere. RADCLIFFE and NOTTINGHAM rise, thinking she needs assistance to her chair. They move upstage to her.*

ELIZABETH (*with a curt gesture*) : Away—I want no help. By the grace of God I have learned to stand alone. And I—will—stand—alone.

[*ELIZABETH goes to her chair and sits. The others have risen, and, joined by NOTTINGHAM and RADCLIFFE, are grouped uneasily downstage. ELIZABETH stares at them. She cannot bring herself to mention Essex, and her pride makes her resentful of their unspoken sympathy. As she generally does, therefore, she takes refuge in irritation.*

Why do ye stay there gaping ? Am I a Gorgon,  
Or so much more a Queen than ye have known  
That all bereft of sense, sound, movement—ha !—  
Ye stand like images ? . . . Are there no tasks t' your  
hands ? . . .

'Tis not the smallest trouble of my sex  
That, being a prince *and* a woman, I must forever brook  
Ninnies about me. . . . God's blood ! were I a man—  
As I should ha' been—there should be livelier doings.

NOTTINGHAM : Had you been a man, madam, you had been greater than your royal father. Yet, being a woman, methinks you are greater still——

ELIZABETH (*angrily*) :

Enough ! I am in no mood for sophistries.

[*ELIZABETH rises and paces to and fro on the dais, the others watching her.*

Yet what are my moods to you ? Ever my mood is crossed.

Would I weep—and may not a queen have tears—  
your laughter grates me ;

Would I be merry—ye are all as sour  
 As the new-christened apples of July. . . .  
 Moods and flatteries. Moods and flatteries.  
 Nothings—eternal nothings !

SCROPE (*diffidently*) :                      What would you, madam ?  
 That we may, we will do, knowing your pleasure.

ELIZABETH :  
 Pleasure ? Pleasure ! Ha !  
 Is that a word to use to a queen ; is pleasure a thing for  
 a queen to have ?  
 Does pleasure become a prince ? And am I light,  
 wanton, a feather blown about  
 On the idle drift of joy ?

RADCLIFFE :                      But, madam, we would ease,  
 If so we may, your heaviness.

ELIZABETH :                      What now ?  
 Heaviness ? Am I so heavy, then ? . . .  
 Ye see, perchance, into my heart, and, seeing,  
 Can read the sum and object of the grief  
 And heaviness ye so impute ? . . . Where is my cause  
 for grief ?  
 Am I not Queen of England ?  
 Tell me—is there a woman of all the world  
 Greater than I ?

NOTTINGHAM :              Your Grace, in all the world  
 No woman is your peer.

FITTON :                      No living woman,  
 Nor any who has lived. She for whose face  
 Great Ilium burned, was not your peer ; nor she  
 Who ruled in Egypt once and broke the wills  
 Of two successive masters of the world.

[*But flattery, usually sure with ELIZABETH, fails now, and  
 FITTON has made a mistake in drawing ELIZABETH'S  
 attention to herself.*]

ELIZABETH (*angrily*) :  
 Ha ! Say you so ! I say you flatter me,  
 And I am not i' the mood. All flattery  
 Has some base purpose.



FITTON (*protesting*): Madam !

ELIZABETH: What's your purpose ? . . .  
*Come here to me !*

[FITTON goes unwillingly to C. ELIZABETH looks down at her from the higher level. She has now found an outlet for her feelings, and is like a cat playing with a rather spirited mouse.]

So, little Mistress Fitton,  
 You have a mind to flatter. Ha ! . . . And think you  
 Of what comparison you make with me ?

FITTON (*frightened but defiant*):  
 From all of history I chose the two  
 Most great—as not so great——

ELIZABETH: Chose—wantons !  
 Helen of Troy and that adulterous Egypt.  
 These—these you think you may compare with me !  
 And I—am I a nothing to endure  
 Such words of a tender slut.

FITTON: I tell you, madam,  
 They were great, you are greater. . . . And, by Your  
 Grace's leave,  
 I am not a slut.

ELIZABETH: Do you bandy words with me ?  
 Do you dare ? . . .  
*You judge all by yourself. I have heard of you,  
 And will name you worse than slut ere all is done.*

SCROPE:  
 Your Majesty—the child's intent was fair.  
 Her choice——

ELIZABETH:  
 Choice—ha !

SCROPE: May justly be put down  
 To inexperience.

ELIZABETH: Enough ! This Mistress Fitton  
 Is lacking in a-many things, but nothing  
 Lacks of—*experience*.

FITTON: Madam, you misjudge me !

ELIZABETH:

So—I lack judgment ! Marry, how great my lack  
Of all things, in your eyes ! . . . But know you this :  
I keep both sight and sense. I have heard and seen  
That which you would I had not. . . .

(*Thoughtfully*) They say in tales  
The fabled unicorn will bow his head  
Into a virgin's lap, and gladly suffer  
Loss of his life and that enchanted sword  
He bears upon his brow, for homage given  
To purity. . . . (*Harshly*) Now, pretty Mistress Fitton,  
*You'll not catch unicorns.*

[*All react. FITTON is furious.*

FITTON:

Oh ! This—from you !

[ELIZABETH recoils. *Tense pause. FITTON is desperately frightened, as well as furious, but she continues hotly.*

Have you, who accuse, never a lover ? Never ?  
Has chaste Diana never a cause to mourn  
Among her errant votaries—you ?

ELIZABETH:

'Fore God

This is too much—(*under her breath*) not to be borne—  
*to-day.*

[ELIZABETH *steps forward and slaps FITTON's face.*  
SOUTHWELL and ONSLOWE *cry out. FITTON stiffens and*  
*throws up her head, defying ELIZABETH, who is at once sorry*  
*for her action, but cannot admit it. ELIZABETH's voice is*  
*shaken as she continues:*

One man only,  
One man, of all I have known, I'd have beside me—  
And him no lover. . . . Burghley, you died too soon !  
Would you were here—to-day. . . . Oh, Burghley !  
Burghley !

I am a-weary of it.  
The endless toil—and the endless pain—alone. . . .  
The blight that fell on the love o' the two that made me,  
On me is fallen. . . .

[*Passionately, strangely, gesturing to FITTON, SOUTHWELL*  
*and ONSLOWE.*

Out o' my sight ! No more—no more—I weary of your  
faces !

Young loveliness, while I—grow old—I'll no more of it now ! . . .

Give me a dirge for joy. Give me a grave for bed.

Death is a lover who sees but the woman and never the queen . . .

[FITTON, SOUTHWELL and ONSLOWE *curtsy and are backing off C. L. when ELIZABETH speaks again, unable longer to keep back what is strongest in her mind.*

Get t' your room ! Get t' your knees ! Hark ye—get t' your knees, and pray

For the passing soul of—a traitor—doomed—to the block—to-day.

FITTON, SOUTHWELL and ONSLOWE *back off in dead silence, frightened by ELIZABETH's emotion.* NOTTINGHAM, SCROPE and RADCLIFFE *watch ELIZABETH tensely and with sympathy.* ELIZABETH *stands very still for a moment, then she goes to her chair and sits, covering her face with her hands. Pause. Then ELIZABETH looks up again, speaking with difficulty.*

Lady Scrope.

[SCROPE *moves quickly upstage.*

You have—no message for me ?

SCROPE :

Alas ! none, madam.

ELIZABETH (*half to herself*) : He is too proud.

And I—I am proud as he. . . . This is the end. . . .

[SCROPE *throws herself on her knees C. R., on the steps.*

SCROPE : May I speak, Your Grace ?

[ELIZABETH *looks at her stonily.*

You have the power—set your greatness above his pride

And pardon him—even now.

ELIZABETH (*coldly*) : So have you said before. . . .  
(*Passionately*) Am I, the Queen, so to demean myself  
As go to him and beg him save his life ?

[RADCLIFFE *moves upstage and kneels by SCROPE.*

RADCLIFFE :

Madam !—you have the royal grace of mercy  
Exceeding pride.

ELIZABETH (*furiously*): I have no mercy, I,  
For one who holds me in scorn—who will not deign  
To use the means of life I gave him.

[NOTTINGHAM *moves upstage to L., but coldly, not emotionally like the others. She remains standing.*

NOTTINGHAM:

Madam !

Hold yourself to your pride, and let compassion  
Melt in the fires of anger. Essex has flouted you,  
Mocked, scorned you ; he has taken base advantage  
Of all your graciousness. Let you be weak to him now  
And treachery will stir its head again  
And raise to strike.

SCROPE: Ah ! Do not heed her, madam !

RADCLIFFE:

Send his pardon, will he or no. . . .  
Send to the Tower—and swift—or 'tis too late !  
Living men may be reasoned from the sickness  
That clouds the mind—but a dead man gives no ear,  
And comes not to your argument again.

SCROPE:

Think ! He is swift in choler—so are all men  
Of mettle such as his—but he has courage.

ELIZABETH (*dully*):

He has not sent my ring.

SCROPE:

Madam—because

He'll take no coward's 'vantage, but await  
Your further grace.

[ELIZABETH *considers this, then starts into action.*

ELIZABETH:

Call here a page !—

NOTTINGHAM (*sharply*):

Madam—no !

[RADCLIFFE *moves quickly to the entrance downstage R. and claps her hands.* THE SECOND PAGE *enters R., bowing to ELIZABETH.*

ELIZABETH:

Stand ready with a swift horse to take a message on  
the instant.

[THE SECOND PAGE *bows and backs off R.*

NOTTINGHAM (*significantly*):

And would you free this rebel only to make  
A king of him?

ELIZABETH (*starting to her feet*): What mean you?

NOTTINGHAM:

Living, he rules with you,  
Or rules *without you*, and—on my soul, Your Grace—  
He'd rather 'twere without you. . . . But 'tis clear  
That *Essex, living, will rule.*

ELIZABETH (*in a cold fury*):

Do you remember, woman, to whom you speak?

NOTTINGHAM (*kneeling*):

Your Grace! I implore you—think upon this matter——

SCROPE:

No time for thought—if you would save his life——

NOTTINGHAM:

His life is justly forfeit. Give it back  
And lay a taper to a pyre in England  
That well may blaze another civil war.

SCROPE:

Heed her not, madam!

RADCLIFFE: Make haste—ah, Heaven!—make haste!  
And send to the Tower!

[ELIZABETH *paces, in considerable agitation.*

ELIZABETH:

Must I endure—again—this agony! . . .  
I've killed him once by the writing of my name,  
And with him killed—what of myself? . . . Oh, God!  
Is't not enough? (*Whispering*) My father suffered thus  
The day my mother died. . . .

(*Passionately*) Ah! pitiless heaven

Will you launch thunderbolts again upon me!

Oh cannot I be stone, ice, adamant,

Never to feel again! . . . Never, never to feel! . . .

Is there no armour of pride, God! is there none,

That I may buckle on against the darts

Which pierce and poison me? . . .

(*Whispering again*) Ah, dare I pardon him?



SCROPE :

Dare, madam !

NOTTINGHAM: Never dare. Let be as 'tis.

ELIZABETH:

Oh, I'm a bear on a chain, tormented ! . . .

## Is there no remedy?

NOTTINGHAM (*significantly*): T' Your Grace's aid, remember  
*The thing he said.*

RADCLIFFE (*sharply*): That was not meant.

**NOTTINGHAM:** He said  
Your body is as crooked as your mind.

RADCLIFFE :  
He meant it not.

SCROPE:                   He was made desperate  
By the withdrawal of his only light  
Which is your favour.

RADCLIFFE :                      Madam !

[ELIZABETH *has reacted to* NOTTINGHAM's reminder. Her *pride is roused again.*

ELIZABETH (*painfully*): I remember.  
And never a pardon that will cancel out  
So vile a slander. . . . Nor could there ever be  
Aught save reproach between us. . . . We are no more,  
Can be, could be—ah !—never shall be more  
Than erring subject—and insulted Queen. . . .  
Essex—shall die.

[SCROPE and RADCLIFFE bow themselves in despair. NOTTINGHAM rises and goes to the entrance downstage R., clapping her hands. THE SECOND PAGE enters, bowing.]

SECOND PAGE:  
I can ride on the instant.

NOTTINGHAM: Nay, we have no need  
O' your service now.

[THE SECOND PAGE bows and backs off R. ELIZABETH stands for a moment, pulling herself together, working up a fiercer anger, then bursts out hysterically :

ELIZABETH: We have forgotten him ! . . .  
 He is dead to us, and in his grave already. . . .  
 We will have music—dancing.

SCROPE (*horrified*): Prithee, forbear.

ELIZABETH:  
 Call the maids hither ! Let us dance !

RADCLIFFE: Oh, madam !

ELIZABETH:  
 Let us dance, I say !

RADCLIFFE: You have sent them to their prayers.

ELIZABETH:  
 For one I have forgotten.

RADCLIFFE: And would you bid them  
 From prayer to dancing ?

ELIZABETH: Marry, that will I !——  
 Am I the Queen, and cannot have my way  
 In such a little thing—(*choking*) being denied  
 So much the greater things ?

[*Furiously, snatching up the sword from the chest.*

Away with you

And bid them hither !

[*ELIZABETH brandishes the sword. NOTTINGHAM goes off*  
*C. L. SCROPE and RADCLIFFE retreat downstage R.,*  
*standing close together, sadly. ELIZABETH continues pas-*  
*sionately:*

Oh, cruel gods  
 Who stride gigantic through the universe  
 And make a mock of men—how you may laugh  
 With a greater laughter in a greater purpose  
 Mocking—

[*Wildly striking and thrusting at the curtains with the sword.*

mocking—the lost desires of queens ! . . .  
 How may we—counter—such adversity——  
 Lose all—yet keep our pride ?

There is no pride in you  
 For your best handiwork—but only—laughter——

Mockery ! Mockery ! . . . Are we no more than base  
And tinselled players, vaunting on the boards  
O' the theatre o' the world, with never a choice  
Of what part we may scan ; ever compelled  
To that we would not . . .

*[Looking at the sword, reflectively.]*

There should be ease  
In this, the narrow metal of a tongue  
That speaks not, but in silence makes all silent.

RADCLIFFE (*urgently*) :  
Your Majesty !

ELIZABETH : Yet I must wait for ease  
Till lingering death is pleased forget my rank  
And tumble me i' the dust with lesser folk. . . .

*[Putting down the sword.]*

Go death, awhile ! . . . Come, pride ! . . .

*[NOTTINGHAM returns C. L. with FITTON, SOUTHWELL, ONSLOWE and FRANCES. The maids curtsy. ELIZABETH speaks to NOTTINGHAM.]*

You to the virginals.  
We'll have a galliard, and mock the fate  
That mocks at us.

*[NOTTINGHAM curtsies and goes off backstage. FITTON, SOUTHWELL, ONSLOWE and FRANCES rise. All but FRANCES, who crosses to RADCLIFFE affectionately, are frightened, for ELIZABETH is in a mood more terrible than they have ever seen, used as they are to her rages.]*

SCROPE (*tearfully*) :

Ah ! had they kept t' their knees,  
And you—joined them in prayer—it had been better.

ELIZABETH :

I am not fond of kneeling, as by this  
You should have known.

*[ELIZABETH stares at SCROPE, then suddenly stalks down-stage to her.]*

All I have is my pride. Pride is not fostered in prayer.

*[A galliard is begun on the virginals off.]*

Come ! We will dance !

[ELIZABETH, FITTON, SOUTHWELL and ONSLOWE, the latter especially unwillingly, dance. ELIZABETH, though old and stiff, is still no mean dancer. SCROPE and RADCLIFFE stand together downstage R., watching, speaking softly and urgently aside together. FRANCES, standing near them, watches with interest, moving a little in time to the music, and longing for the time when she will be old enough to join the dance.]

RADCLIFFE: They must be taking him to the scaffold—even now.

SCROPE: Aye! What a coil of circumstance.

RADCLIFFE: Her pride—and his. Conflicting pride. . . . Yet she would have reprieved him—at the last—but for your sister——

SCROPE: My sister—may she suffer for this! (*Suddenly, on an awful suspicion*) Why did not Essex send the ring?

RADCLIFFE: He would not bow to her will again. (*Suddenly reacting, staring at SCROPE*) Why—do you think he did—and someone—intercepted it?

SCROPE: I know not what to think—but be careful.

[*They whisper together, uneasily, watching the dancers. ONSLOWE has been increasingly loth to continue, and now stops suddenly, bursting into tears.*]

ONSLowe: Oh! I cannot go on! I cannot! . . . To-day—now—when he is——

RADCLIFFE (*urgently*): Quiet, child!

ELIZABETH (*angrily*): How now? Why do you break the dance?

ONSLowe: I—I—— (*Passionately*) Oh, I have a heart if you have none.

[ELIZABETH draws a quick breath. There is a tense pause, and silence except for the music, which in its gaiety is a terrible contrast with the emotions of those on stage. ELIZABETH is rigid with anger, her face a mask, trying to find words. Then, before she can speak, there is heard from off the dull and muffled sound of a gun. ONSLOWE screams and drops to her knees, covering her face with her hands. All the others react, FRANCES, suddenly frightened, burying her face in RADCLIFFE's dress and clinging to her. ELIZABETH staggers, then holds herself rigidly again.]

RADCLIFFE (*quietly*): May the Lord have mercy on his soul.

SCROPE: Amen.

ELIZABETH (*dully*): Why have we stopped—the dance?  
(*Imperatively, to ONSLOWE*) Up, girl! Come!

[ELIZABETH tries to dance again, makes a few steps, falters and stops. She staggers. RADCLIFFE hurries to her and helps her to her chair. FITTON, SOUTHWELL and ONSLOWE are a frightened group downstage L. SCROPE goes quickly off backstage. FRANCES runs to SOUTHWELL, clinging to her. The music stops. SCROPE and NOTTINGHAM enter backstage and move downstage R. RADCLIFFE is standing behind ELIZABETH's chair. ELIZABETH sits quite still for a moment, then rises and moves to the backstage entrance. FITTON, SOUTHWELL, ONSLOWE and FRANCES curtsy. RADCLIFFE, SCROPE and NOTTINGHAM move towards ELIZABETH, but she gestures them back and goes off alone. FITTON, SOUTHWELL, ONSLOWE and FRANCES rise, and, at a gesture from RADCLIFFE, go off C. L. RADCLIFFE moves downstage to SCROPE and NOTTINGHAM.]

RADCLIFFE (*curtly*): Well, milady Nottingham, you have achieved your purpose.

NOTTINGHAM: A good riddance. . . . He should have sent the ring.

RADCLIFFE: He was too brave to seek advantage by it.

NOTTINGHAM: He was ever a fool.

SCROPE: Stay! What if he *did* send it?

NOTTINGHAM (*starting*): How say you?

SCROPE (*staring at NOTTINGHAM*): Perchance it fell—into other hands.

[Pause. NOTTINGHAM returns SCROPE's stare. Then NOTTINGHAM laughs.]

NOTTINGHAM: A fantastic notion! Who would intercept a love bauble?

SCROPE (*slowly, suspiciously*): Who, indeed? . . . You have proved yourself his bitter enemy to-day.

NOTTINGHAM (*reacting*): I? Do you—



RADCLIFFE (*interrupting quickly*): It matters not now. Essex is dead. But—if the ring was sent—*she* must never know. It would kill her to have remorse instead of pride. . . . We do not know. Let us not enquire. (*Glancing upstage*) S'sh ! The Queen ! Leave her alone awhile.

[RADCLIFFE, SCROPE and NOTTINGHAM go off C. L.  
ELIZABETH enters slowly backstage.

ELIZABETH (*dully, to herself*):

May the Lord have mercy on his soul.

[*She takes up the sword again, and balances it on her hands thoughtfully. RADCLIFFE looks cautiously on C. L., beckoning to SCROPE and NOTTINGHAM, who join her. They all stand together, tense, watching ELIZABETH, afraid of what she may do, yet afraid to speak. ELIZABETH, deep in her own thoughts, does not know they are there.*

And heaven have mercy, too,  
(If heaven can give what earth forever lacks),

Upon—my—heart. . . .

Let me not feel, oh God !

Let me not feel this unrelenting pain. . . .

Oh ! it exceeds my bearing ! . . .

[*Clenching her hands upon the sword.*

It must bite within

Like an embosomed viper—never be spoken

Because I am raised on a throne in sight of all. . . .

A throne ?—A crucifix !

[FRANCES enters C. L., passes the others before they notice her there, and moves upstage to C., standing on the lower level and looking up at ELIZABETH, wondering. ELIZABETH takes no notice of her, but continues, on a hushed note of horror.

I killed you, Mary—

Mary of Scotland—laid your dangerous head

Where—his—but now is laid. . . . You are revenged  
on me . . .

From wheresoever now you flaunt your beauty

And cozen men's pale ghosts to wishing back

All the hot blood was theirs on earth, you may laugh ;

You may laugh at me. . . . Whatever hell you have

You'll not descend to mine. . . .

[ELIZABETH goes slowly to her chair, using the sword as a stick, and sits.

There is no hell

So deep as desolation.

[FRANCES moves upstage to ELIZABETH, curious, sympathetic, frightened a little.

FRANCES:

Why is Your Grace unhappy?

[ELIZABETH looks at her without comprehension. FRANCES touches the sword, of which she disapproves.

Why do you have a sword? They are for men.

[FRANCES gently takes the sword from ELIZABETH, replaces it on the chest, and returns to her, curtsying.

If there is any service I may do. . . .

[ELIZABETH notices her, and slowly stretches out a hand, touching her hair.

ELIZABETH (*strangely*):

Why—child—what do you here?

You are young to be here. This is a place of grief

Unmeet for sunshine, poppet. . . .

(*To herself*) But I had not your age

When a king, my father, killed a queen—my mother. . . .

You're a sweet child. . . . And are you dutiful

And hold your mother's love?

FRANCES (*gravely*):

Indeed I think so, madam.

ELIZABETH (*unsteadily*):

Hold well to it. There is no better thing

For you—for her . . . nothing, nothing so good. . . .

I would have given—all I have ever had

For such as you are. . . . Golden emptiness

Of all the lofty pageantry I know

Is bitter recompense for—such a gift

As you are. . . . More than half a hundred years

Have passed me, child, since I was what you are—

And brought me—what?

[ELIZABETH suddenly breaks down, clutching FRANCES to her and bursting into tears.

Oh, cruel, cruel England !  
 How have I starved my heart in serving you ! . . .  
 Essex—dear my love—you have gone from me.  
 You end in blood—and I—in bitterness !

[FITTON, SOUTHWELL and ONSLOWE have crept on C. L. and joined the others. All are tense, awed by ELIZABETH'S grief. NOTTINGHAM is especially concerned. Though no friend of Essex, she loves the Queen, and cannot bear this terrible and unexpected breakdown.]

NOTTINGHAM (suddenly) : Oh, this is not to be borne !

RADCLIFFE (urgently) : Stay !

[NOTTINGHAM moves quickly C. and falls on her knees.]

NOTTINGHAM :

Madam—I must tell you.

[RADCLIFFE is beside her, with a compelling hand on her shoulder. ELIZABETH looks up, dazed at first, then becoming angry as she realizes that her women have discovered her weakness.]

RADCLIFFE (desperately interrupting NOTTINGHAM, silencing her) : She would say

You have our very sympathy.

ELIZABETH (stonily) :

How now ?

[Putting FRANCES aside, rising.]

Sympathy ? (fiercely) And what of that—to me ?  
 Is that a word i' the catalogue of a queen ?

[She is furiously angry again. All curtsy, not daring to face her.]

Must I be drenched in brine because a traitor  
 Has kissed the axe to-day ? . . . I'll have you know  
 I'm Harry Tudor's daughter—bound to none  
 In bonds o' the heart, save England only—England  
 Who needs no tears . . .

(Hysterically) Come, we will dance again !  
 Dance ! Dance !! Dance !!!

CURTAIN

Eden Phillpotts

THE MARKET-MONEY

*A Play*

# CHARACTERS

INSPECTOR PARSONS

CONSTABLE JOHN COTTLE

CONSTABLE ANDREW CHUGG

MARY CLIMO

DR. SHORT

AARON CLIMO

JENNIFER CLIMO

JOSHUA CLIMO

LABOURERS



SCENE: *Police station at the village of Holne, Dartmoor. Inspector's desk on left behind rail. A chair below it. On right a long bench and another chair. There is an entrance at back, centre, and another door, to the cells, on right. A blind is drawn down over window on left of central entrance and a gas-jet burns over Inspector's desk. Upon the front of desk and upon the walls of the police station hang notices of precautions against swine fever, of men wanted, etc. One of these sheets may have a portrait upon it.*

INSPECTOR PARSONS *is writing at his desk in the box railed off on left. From outside, faintly heard, comes the grunt of a steam roundabout's music. Men and women's voices are heard off and occasional laughter and whistling as people pass the police station.*

*Enter C.,* CONSTABLE JOHN COTTLE.

PARSONS: Fair-day's gone off very nice and quiet, Cottle.

COTTLE: Oh, yes. It's always very nice and quiet in Holne—a darned sight too nice and quiet for an ambitious man, Inspector.

[PARSONS *laughs, shuts his book, puts down his pen and descends from his box.*

COTTLE: Even on a fair-day, and gipsies and rough customers about and all, we be so orderly as a lot of sheep in a pen. Nought more than a drunk and a fight between schoolboys.

PARSONS: Yes, we're a very law-abiding folk on Dartmoor. A pity the towns don't follow our example, John.

COTTLE: All very well for you, Inspector. You've done your bit. I want to do mine. A nursemaid could do my job.

PARSONS: A very good record we've got up here. In twenty years I can't call home as we've been in the newspapers a dozen times. A few homicides, John, and a suicide now and again, but only three stark murders; and one of them was done by a foreigner from Barnstaple.

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COTTLE: Well, I'm fed up. I want to go somewhere to catch the eye and get a show, and a dog's chance of promotion. I'm wasted in this place, Mr. Parsons.

PARSONS: If all young men was as clever as they think they are, what a smart world it would be ! 'Tis very hateful to know you'm such a wonder, John Cottle, and can't get a chance to show it—eh ?

COTTLE: You laugh, but I suppose you felt different while you was in your prime.

PARSONS: So I did then. When I was twenty-five, I was like you—saw just exactly how to put the world right, if the old ones would only have allowed it ; and now I'm fifty-five—'tis the world that puts me right, John. The world ain't half such a fool as we think it. You did ought to read some wise books and enlarge your brain, my son.

*[Voices from time to time outside and the faint blare of the steam organ playing the same tune over and over again.]*

COTTLE: I don't want no books ; I want work. I want to catch some of the damned rascals as be knocking innocent women on the head and getting away with it every time. There's something rotten at Scotland Yard—that's what I say. There's barefaced murders in every paper you open, yet the hangman don't get a job once in six months. For why ? Because nobody's ever caught now-a-days.

PARSONS: Them be caught that the Lord wills to be caught. You do your duty and mind your own business and don't be in no hurry for horrors. They'll come along. Human nature don't change. I wish it did. I felt same as you do once ; but, after forty, even a policeman would sooner neighbour along with them that keep the law than break it. You'll get your chance, however. Every bobby I ever met have had his chance soon or late.

COTTLE: I've hopes of Aaron Climo for that matter. He's drinking off and on now, and he swore yesterday that he'd do in his old Uncle Joshua ; and Bill Newte heard him. No loss if he did settle the old hunks, and might be somebody's gain.

PARSONS: You didn't ought to let your business make you bloodthirsty. That's not the right spirit, and well you know it, John.

COTTLE: You can't help seeing a storm when it's brewing. Aaron Climo always reckoned he was good for Coomber Farm, being the only relation Joshua Climo had in the world. But then Joshua took and married Mary Blee, and her a score of years younger than him, and so Aaron's number was up.

PARSONS: True; and from that time I'm afraid he's been a backslider. A steady enough man till lately and the prop of his old mother. 'Tis strange how hope of a dead man's shoes will keep some people straight.

COTTLE: He's lost hope now; and if you lose hope you're done for.

PARSONS: A well-meaning chap and a very good son. Used to read the lessons in church and keep rabbits and caveys. But I'm feared for him lately. He don't go to church no more.

COTTLE: He goes to the "Church House" Inn though. Tom Chave had to deny him liquor last week. And he can't get work and his rent's behind a year, and he's like to be on the street and his mother too afore Quarter-day.

PARSONS: I know all about it, John, and very sorry I am. Only Friday last he went to his Uncle Climo at Coomber and begged for thirty-one pounds, that being the sum standing between him and his ruin at this minute. And Jennifer Climo, his mother, went with him.

COTTLE: Aaron got no change out of the old man, I'll lay.

PARSONS: He did not. Joshua gave him hell, egged him on and told him he was a disgrace to the family. Then Aaron, frantic-like, swore that, if he weren't saved from his misfortunes, he'd go forth and hang himself on the first sizable tree he came to.

COTTLE: That pleased Josh, no doubt.

PARSONS: Delighted the hard old devil. He said that Aaron was right to end his days, and he only hoped his pluck would last; and he went so far as to offer him a new hemp rope, to help on the good work. Then Jennifer flew out and cussed Joshua to hell, and Mary Climo, Joshua's wife, took a hand also. 'Twas a very sad affair and I had it from old Jennifer after.

COTTLE: Did she tell you that her son swore, if he went out of it, he'd take good care his uncle kept him company?

PARSONS: She did, and I told her that such horrid threats, spoke in passion, were best forgot and not repeated. Aaron ain't that sort. He's a mild-mannered man away from liquor. And, be it as 'twill, I much doubt if Joshua could have found thirty pounds all in a minute. Coomber Farm's a poor place.

COTTLE: Well, he's made a brave dollop of money to-day—Joshua, I mean. He sold his wethers for a tidy lot at the fair, and five ponies also. Three figures it ran to, for Mary Climo told me so, and I advised her to get Josh into his market-cart and off home more than an hour ago.

PARSONS: Then you're on the side of law and order after all, John! Was he sober?

COTTLE: Oh, yes—just lively, that's all. He was putting his hoss in the cart when I left "The Church House."

PARSONS: Mary will drive, I reckon. 'Tis a dark night and a rough road up to Coomber.

*[A woman's cry outside; then a man's voice.]*

CONSTABLE CHUGG (*off*): Quiet, quiet, woman! Keep your head, there's a good creature. No use bawling about it, whatever 'tis.

*[Enter ANDREW CHUGG supporting MARY CLIMO. She is in a distracted state, her clothes torn, her bonnet on one side, her hair down. She is very lame and there is blood upon her face. Her eyes are starting out of her head and she is gasping and shaking.]*

PARSONS (*going to her and supporting her*): Lord save us, Mrs. Climo! What's wrong.

CHUGG: She don't know herself what's wrong. She's dotty.

*[Voices outside and music of mouth-organ.]*

PARSONS: Sit here, my dear, and calm down. (*He supports her to a chair.*) Get the brandy, John.

*[COTTLE fetches brandy-bottle and a glass from cupboard behind THE INSPECTOR'S desk.]*

MARY CLIMO: Murder—it's murder—keep him off for God's sake!



PARSONS: You're all right. You're safe now. Drink this—that's it—don't you be frightened no more. I'm here.

MARY: Murder—red murder, and I saw it—Joshua—oh, keep him off me, Mr. Parsons.

*[She is hysterical and clings to THE INSPECTOR.]*

PARSONS (to CONSTABLE CHUGG): Best run across for Dr. Short, Andrew. He won't be to bed yet. We shan't get nought out of her till doctor's settled her down.

MARY: The devil—the hard-hearted, cruel wretch! And he'd have had me too. He lay in wait for us both—like a tiger he lay hid——

*[Exit CHUGG.]*

Oh, my God—wish I'd never been born afore I saw that fearful sight. I'll die of it—I'll die of it!

PARSONS: There—there. I've sent for doctor. You'm more frightened than hurt, I hope.

MARY: Me too—he was going to kill me too—he said so—and only God's mercy and my own legs saved me alive. And one of them be very near broke—Joshua's dead—he's killed him—smashed his head in—O Christ, help us!

*[Is hysterical again.]*

PARSONS: Who done it? Who's the man that done it, Missis Climo? Can you tell?

MARY: I saw him. I saw him in the light of the lantern—so plain as I see you—saw him and heard him. He beat my husband's head in—I heard it crack, like a bone in a dog's mouth. His own nephew—his own flesh and blood.

PARSONS: Aaron Climo!

COTTLE: Where was it, Mum? Where did it happen? Where did Aaron fall upon his Uncle?

MARY: To Venwill Rocks, top of the hill.

COTTLE (to PARSONS): That's where he'll be then?

PARSONS: Aye. There's the dead and the living. Joshua won't run away: but t'other may do so. Call half a dozen chaps together. Then Chugg can také 'em along to the



Rocks, and me and you will look round for the man, if so be he's home and means to bluff it on a alibi.

[*Exit* COTTLE.

MARY: He'll have me yet ! He'll have me yet, Mr. Parsons. He knows he won't be safe till he's got me too. Save me from him, for your hope of heaven, and I'll pray for you for evermore.

PARSONS: We be going to, my dear ; we be going to save you. You be quite safe now. Don't you fear nothing at all. Just pull yourself together and tell Dr. Short all about it. Let down this drop of drink—there—no need to hold on to me.

MARY: Don't you leave me then.

[*Enter* CONSTABLE CHUGG and DR. SHORT.

DR. SHORT: Hullo, Parsons, what's the trouble ?

PARSONS: Can't be sure yet, Doctor. But it looks like as if old Josh Climo had got it in the neck. His wife here knows, if you can get it out of her. I've got to be busy for half an hour, and I'll ax you just to calm her down and get her talking afore I come back.

DR. SHORT: Why, Mrs. Climo, from Coomber—so it is ! What's happened ? Get me a basin and water and a towel, Chugg.

[*Exit* CHUGG by door left. *Voices outside.* *Enter* COTTLE.

MARY: Don't you leave me, Doctor. I won't be left alone. I see his eyes a-glaring through the walls everywhere I turn.

DR. SHORT: I'm not going to leave you.

PARSONS: You shan't be left a moment, Mrs. Climo, not a moment. You tell doctor all about it. He'll bide along with you till we come back.

[*Enter* CHUGG with basin and towel. DR. SHORT washes MARY's face and she gets better and tries to tidy herself ; but she is shivering and full of distress and fear.

PARSONS: Now, Chugg, you take them chaps outside, get the stretcher and slip it up over to Venwill Rocks so smart as you mind to. That's where the deed was done, and I'm feared you'll find Joshua Climo there in a bad way. Take liquor and your electric torch, and don't waste no time.

[Exit CHUGG.

(To COTTLE) And you and me will go down to Aaron Climo's and see his mother.

COTTLE: He may be there himself.

PARSONS: He would be there, if he'd done what he meant to do; but he'll hardly be there now, I reckon, because he knows the woman has escaped. He tried for 'em both, she says, and probably he did. But us'll hear what his mother's got to say. Take handcuffs on the chance. You never know exactly what a man will do next, not after he's done murder. (To DR. SHORT) I'm going to run down to Aaron Climo's cottage, Doctor. I shan't be much above ten minutes. Then you might get after Chugg and they chaps, and see if there's anything to be done for the poor chap.

[Exit PARSONS and COTTLE. COTTLE has taken a revolver and a pair of handcuffs from a cupboard behind THE INSPECTOR'S desk.

MARY (to DR. SHORT): 'Tis no good you going to my old man and leaving me. I won't be left. Death's death, and no more harm can hap to Joshua; but I'm at his mercy still.

DR. SHORT (brings second chair and sits by MARY): Fear nothing and tell me about it from the beginning, Mrs. Climo.

[The steam-organ grunts faintly far off.

MARY: All went very well with us, sir. My master sold his things at the fair and made a bit over a hundred pound by 'em, and he was only market-merry when he put the hoss in the cart. We were a bit late, because I went in to have a tell with Aaron Climo's mother and warn her that the man was saying wicked things against Joshua; but Jennifer Climo's took her son's side against my husband, as she always has done. We left Holne half after ten and

lighted our lantern and set off. A very black night and us went slow, because our hoss is old. But my husband was in a good mood and cheerful at his great success. He was sober—that I'll swear to—but he was sleepy, and presently he gave me the reins, and I drove. We'd climbed the hill and was turning the corner by Venwill Rocks when a man jumped out on the road and got to the hoss's head; and Joshua, who were only in a dog-sleep, felt the jolt and waked and yelled to the fellow to let go, else he'd beat him across the face with his whip. And in the flash of the lantern I see it was Aaron Climo.

DR. SHORT: You can swear to that, Missis? It's an awful thing to say if you are not positive.

MARY: I can, sir, on my oath afore my Maker I can—though he looked more like a devil than a man. 'Twas Aaron Climo, white as a dog's tooth, with hell in his eyes and death in his face. But Joshua weren't frightened; nought ever frightened him. He lighted down out of the cart, and so soon as he got to ground, the murderer was on him and flung him in the road and beat at his head. I jumped down too and dashed at Aaron; but he held me by my neck and very near broke it. "You wait," he said; "your turn's coming." Oh, Jesus! I hear him now.

DR. SHORT: Threatened you too?

MARY: Yes—"Your turn's coming," he said; and then I see it was do or die for me, as well as poor Joshua. He meant to slay the pair of us, so as there should be no witness. I made one hugeous struggle and tore myself out of his hand; then I ran down the hill into the moor, where 'tis all rocks and stones and fuzz. And he cussed and made after me. But I'd got a start and 'twas so black as pitch. He'd have followed the noise I made and catched me and smashed my head in no doubt, but for the blessing of God, for I went heels over head into a pit—a drain as runs down from the top of the hill—and if he'd come that way he'd have falled atop of me. Then he stopped to listen, and I bided still as still—aquott, like a hare in her form, not daring to breathe, and feeling the blood running down my face, and fearing my leg was broke. He rambled about and cursed me to hell; then he went back up on the road, and I knew why.

DR. SHORT: To be sure poor Joshua Climo was dead.

MARY: He'd made sure of that afore, sir. He hit him till I heard my husband's head go like a broke coco-nut. 'Twas for the market-money the murderer went; and I bided a bit till all was quiet, then crawled down to the river and got back up through the plantations to Holne. And very near torn to pieces afore I got there; and please God they'll take the man, else I shall never close my eyes in peace in this world no more, for he swore my turn would come.

DR. SHORT: They'll take him, Mrs. Climo. Have no fear for that. He hasn't got the wits to escape very long.

MARY: 'Tis vain for Mister Inspector to go to his house. He won't be there.

DR. SHORT: A very likely place. For then his mother can swear an alibi.

MARY: What's her word against mine?

[*Voices outside.*]

AARON CLIMO (*off*): Never, Mister Inspector—never on your life!

[*Enter INSPECTOR PARSONS, with CONSTABLE COTTLE and AARON CLIMO in handcuffs. Old JENNIFER CLIMO, AARON's mother, follows. AARON wears trousers and a shirt and boots. He has no hat and his hair is rough and his manner bewildered. There are voices outside.*]

PARSONS: They ban't back, Doctor?

DR. SHORT: Not yet.

PARSONS: And have Mrs. Climo come round?

DR. SHORT: Yes, yes—she's told a coherent tale. It's clear enough. (*To MARY*) I was right, you see.

MARY (*glaring at AARON*): You bloody fiend! Thank God they've got you red-handed.

JENNIFER: He ain't red-handed, Mary. Don't you put a rope round my boy's neck like that. He never done it.

MARY: Be I blind? Be I deaf? Didn't I see him kill his uncle? Didn't he smash my husband's head in! And wouldn't I be a deader this minute but for Heaven on my side?



PARSONS: See if they be coming along, John.

[*Exit* COTTLE.]

You can speak now, Aaron Climo. Choose your words careful, because they may be used against you. Give heed, Doctor, and don't you interrupt, old lady. (*To* JENNIFER) Your turn will come. Every man be innocent till he's proved guilty, remember.

AARON (*lifting his hands in his handcuffs*): I swear afore my God to the truth of what I tell you. I've been very near down and out—I know it. I've been drinking and I've been saying as I'd do for my uncle, because he wouldn't help to save me. That's all true: I don't deny it. A score heard me. But to-day—this very day—the luck turned. I didn't go to the Fair.

MARY: I saw you there.

AARON: Aunt Mary, I can prove it. After my breakfast I said to mother that I'd try to get work yet again; and I set out to Ashburton by eight o'clock. I called at half a score of places, and at last, down to Farmer White's, at Bradley Barton, I found work. He's took me on—not for my own sake, but for mother's, because they Whites be lifelong friends of hers. And then I came home, dog-tired and thankful to God as I was saved alive. And my mother can swear I was only out of the house after supper for an hour or less. And I came back afore eleven o'clock and went to bed.

JENNIFER: So I can then; and that's where Inspector and John Cottle found him—in bed and asleep.

PARSONS: In bed he was; and no sign of nought against him round about, for us looked over his clothes and so on. But this be only the beginning. There's plenty of time to get down to the truth.

MARY: 'Twas between ten and eleven he murdered my husband at Venwill Rocks and promised to murder me.

AARON: You'm wrong—you'm terribly wrong, Aunt Mary. I was never out of the village.

MARY: Don't I know your face, Aaron Climo? Didn't the lantern on the cart-shaft burn bright and clear?



Didn't you say that my turn would come after you'd killed your uncle? And when I broke from you, didn't you run seeking me over the heath and cuss the darkness, because you couldn't lay your bloody hands upon me?

AARON: I swear 'twas another man than me. I know nought about it.

JENNIFER: And I swear he don't, neither. Be he that sort? Call home his peaceful life and good behaviour till he got led away by his trouble. A man as kept bees and guinea-pigs and hated to kill a chicken. A peaceful man—a church-going, good man till Joshua Climo drove him mad with his cruel tongue—a man well thought upon, as never deserved the wicked luck he got—a man who's worn out his boots for a month trying to find honest work. A good son—always a good son. A man——

*[Voices silence her. The steam hurdy-gurdy drones faintly. Then a slow tramp of feet and the voices of COTTLE and CHUGG. The door at centre is thrown open and half a dozen labourers bring in a stretcher on which lies the body of JOSHUA CLIMO hidden under a horse-cloth.]*

CHUGG: The hoss was standing in the cart five yards from the body, and Arthur Partridge have drove it home to Coomber Farm.

*[They put the stretcher on the long bench. The men mop their foreheads and crowd together behind it.]*

DR. SHORT: Dead, Chugg?

CHUGG: Dead as pork, Doctor. His head's broke in.

PARSONS: Didn't see nobody about?

CHUGG: Not a sign; but this I found beside the body.

*[Gives PARSONS a big pocket-book.]*

MARY: That's Joshua's. He had all his money in it.

PARSONS: 'Tis empty enough now, Missis.

*[While MARY, JENNIFER, PARSONS, COTTLE and DR. SHORT crowd over pocket-book, and in a moment of silence, there comes a strange, inarticulate sound between a grunt and a groan. The people separate so that the body under the horse-cloth is visible. They stare at it and DR. SHORT approaches.]*

PARSONS: Was it him, Doctor?

JENNIFER: God save us!

[*The horse-cloth moves and rises into a point, as JOSHUA CLIMO sits up under it. There is a startled sound from the men looking on, and MARY, who is forgotten, puts her hand to her breast and totters. The horse-cloth falls off and reveals JOSHUA CLIMO. He is an old man with a bald head and grey beard but a clean shaven mouth. His head is covered with blood and his face and beard and breast also. He stares round him, then sees his wife and gets on his feet, swaying and shaking. He takes a step towards her and glares. He cannot speak but lifts his hand and points at her. His mouth opens wide and shuts, and opens again. An expression of fury convulses his face. MARY gives one horrible scream and faints, while at the same moment JOSHUA CLIMO, taking another step towards her, falls forward upon his face. DR. SHORT goes to him and kneels beside him, and COTTLE and CHUGG lift him and support him. PARSONS goes to MARY.*

PARSONS (to JENNIFER): Loose her neck, Ma'am; loose her neck and stays.

JENNIFER: Loose my son, Mister Inspector. 'Tis him you've got to loose.

PARSONS: All in good time, Mrs. Climo.

[*DR. SHORT shakes his head over JOSHUA CLIMO.*

DR. SHORT: He's dead enough now—the last flash——

AARON: 'Twas A'mighty God brought him back, to save me, Doctor.

[*JENNIFER, who has been opening MARY's dress, jumps up with a strange cry. She has removed something from inside MARY's gown and now gives it to PARSONS—something from each hand. MARY recovers consciousness and sits up on the ground and stares at the dead man near her.*

PARSONS (*holding out a handful of notes and a little bag of money*): The market-money! Oh, Mary, Mary!

[*All gaze at the face of MARY CLIMO in silence. The organ of the roundabout plays faintly.*

H. F. Rubinstein and Halcott Glover

PROPHECY

*An Episode*

## CHARACTERS

UZZIEL

MISHAEL — his eldest son

ELZAPHAN — his second son

ZITHRI — his third son

SHELOMITH — a girl

DEVOTEES OF THE GOLDEN CALF

A MAN RUNNING

The scene is in the Wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt.

*Among the outlying tents of the Hebrew camp is that of UZZIEL and his three sons. It is the simplest of shelters: a cloth stretched upon poles, similar to that of bedawy tribes to-day. The scene is enclosed by other tents, deserted save by here and there an old man or woman left in charge, the Hebrews being gathered in the centre of the camp, unseen but not unheard. They dance about the golden calf, and sounds of singing, laughter and shouting come distantly. Bright cloths, saddles and the loose litter of the camp give touches of colour; an unbroken blue sky is over all, and afternoon sunlight. On a mound beside UZZIEL's tent, a little to the right of it, sits ELZAPHAN, one arm in a sling. He is rapt in meditation. To him enters from a neighbouring tent SHELOMITH, a young and beautiful girl, whose name means The Peaceful. She comes so quietly that ELZAPHAN does not notice her.*

SHELOMITH (*her voice is gentle*): Elzaphan !

ELZAPHAN (*looking up in pleased surprise*): Shelomith ! I had not seen you approaching.

SHELOMITH: Your father—he is better ?

ELZAPHAN (*mournfully, shaking his head*): He is sick—very sick. He will not see to-morrow's sun.

SHELOMITH: Ah, I feared from your looks. . . .

ELZAPHAN: I sorrow for many things, Shelomith.

SHELOMITH: You have cause. And your arm—does it pain you still ?

ELZAPHAN: It is almost well. You too look sad.

SHELOMITH (*bitterly*): Yet my sisters are revelling !

[*She points to back, whence come sounds of cymbals and rude music.*

ELZAPHAN (*assenting, without bitterness*): Zithri, my brother, is with them. A fool, among many fools.

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Applications for permission to perform this play should be made to the Secretary, The League of British Dramatists, 84 Drayton Gardens, London, S.W.10.

This play is the fifth and final Episode in the dramatic sequence, *Exodus*, published by Messrs. Ernest Benn, Ltd., Bouverie House, Bouverie Street, London, E.C.4, at 3s. 6d.



SHELOMITH (*with contempt*): A Golden Calf ! My sisters gave their earrings, to be molten with the rest. They would have taken mine. . . . (*She touches them, laughing in her wisdom.*) And now they dance before this effigy, thinking so to end Israel's troubles. The way of the simple !

ELZAPHAN: My brother Mishael cries fury and vengeance against them. For me, I am not wroth. Rather, I marvel.

SHELOMITH: Does your father know ?

ELZAPHAN: His mind wanders ; he has forgotten the world.

SHELOMITH: As well so.

ELZAPHAN: He is to be envied . . . and yet, I could be content to live. If only——

SHELOMITH: If Moses would return !

ELZAPHAN (*looking up*): Would that lighten our burden ?

SHELOMITH (*in surprise*): Do *you* not think it ?

ELZAPHAN: Moses—Moses ! Wait till Moses is back among us ! So Mishael speaks. What then ? I answer him: what have we gained ?

SHELOMITH: We have regained our Leader.

ELZAPHAN: Whither to lead us !

SHELOMITH (*sighing*): To the land that was promised : where there is grass, and the shade of trees ; the solace of a thousand wells. . . .

[*She sits beside him.*]

ELZAPHAN: To be won by the sword, to be lost by the sword. I want no promised land on those terms.

SHELOMITH (*with sympathy*): It is your wound that weakens you. When you are strong and can use your arm again——

ELZAPHAN: Do you know how I would use my arm ?

SHELOMITH: I know how valiantly you used it against the Amalekites.

ELZAPHAN: Not so would I use it again. . . . Not in fighting but in writing.

SHELOMITH (*her ideas limited*): A Book of the Dead ?

ELZAPHAN: Nay, we left that in Egypt. A book of the living. Not to lie in the swathings of a mummy, a passport to Osiris, but in the quick breasts of men. . . . All day long I dream.

SHELOMITH: What do you dream?

ELZAPHAN: Tales. As of Jacob when he journeyed far from home to dwell in Haran with his kinsman Laban. He came into the strange land, and behold, a well in the field, and sheep lying by it; for out of that well the flocks were watered. And Jacob said to the herdsmen, Know ye Laban, the son of Nahor? The herdsmen answered, We know him, and behold Rachel his daughter comes with the sheep. While he yet spake with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep; and Jacob went near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, watering the flock of Laban, his mother's brother. And Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept. . . .

SHELOMITH: These are the things you would write? To what end?

ELZAPHAN: To none, but my delight in them. I would gather into form all the tales of our people, spoken at evening. . . . But I think my desire is not idle. The sayings of Aaron, the fierce songs of Miriam—these one day shall be written down, and be Israel's words of power. I would write words of love.

SHELOMITH: What is love?

*[She leans towards him.]*

ELZAPHAN (*rousing himself*): When I think of Jacob, I am Jacob; when I think of Rachel, I see you, Shelomith. I love you, as Jacob loved Rachel.

SHELOMITH: I love *you*, Elzaphan.

ELZAPHAN: To all who love, Jacob shall be language. You and I, Shelomith, will die, as Rachel and Jacob died; but as their love enriches ours, ours will enrich a million's to come after. Honour the written word.

SHELOMITH (*laughing in soft irony*): How like to each other, you and your brothers!

ELZAPHAN: How?

SHELOMITH: Zithri, who worships a golden calf; Mishael, who awaits the Law; and Elzaphan (*laying a hand on his knee*) who would tell tales to the unborn. Men—men! And all the time a woman knows.

ELZAPHAN (*covering her hand with his palm*): Tell me, woman of six moons.

[*Smiling at her youth.*]

SHELOMITH: Nay, I have no language. But this.

[*Carrying his hand to her lips.*]

ELZAPHAN: And we must wander, and strive, and suffer! (*raising his injured arm*). How can I ask my father's blessing!

SHELOMITH: Is it wrong to love?

ELZAPHAN: In a land of peace, in a land of plenty—no! But here, among the stones, enemies without, traitors within. . . .

SHELOMITH: The more reason—lest death prevent.

ELZAPHAN: Flower in the desert, death shall not prevent! Nor my brothers, nor the tumult of the Calf (*as a fresh outburst rises of shouting and music, drawing near*). To-night I will tell my father.

SHELOMITH: And he?

ELZAPHAN: He is old and feeble. His mind is like a closely filled scroll—there is no space left in it. But fear not. Go in, Shelomith (*rising*). These obscene (*waving his hand towards the revellers*), are not for you to witness.

[SHELOMITH *slips back into her tent. The crowd passes close by, taking a turn which does not bring them into view. One, detached from the main body, comes panting and laughing, throws himself exhausted near ELZAPHAN. It is ZITHRI, a younger man than ELZAPHAN, unintelligent and mean. He has been dancing naked, and his robe is thrown loosely round him.*]

ELZAPHAN (*looking down in pity*): Well, brother?

ZITHRI (*sitting up*): Good sport. This is what I call serving the gods! Something you can see, something to do, something like old Egypt. Why weren't you there? And Mishael—where is he?

ELZAPHAN: With my father.

[*Pointing to the hut.*

ZITHRI (*a trifle sobered*): Father. . . . Does he know? (*He gets on his feet.*)

ELZAPHAN: I have not told him.

ZITHRI (*sneering*): You are ashamed of your brother?

ELZAPHAN: As you are ashamed, Zithri. But it is nothing to me.

ZITHRI: I am not ashamed. I came to rest a little, and see what my family were doing. You should have been with us.

ELZAPHAN: Your gods are no comfort to me.

ZITHRI: First try them. We are to sacrifice at sunset to Hathor! Join us! You will come away exalted.

ELZAPHAN: I have no wish to be—exalted.

ZITHRI: You are content as you are?

ELZAPHAN: No.

ZITHRI: What then do you want?

ELZAPHAN: Peace.

ZITHRI: No more fighting—there I'm with you.

ELZAPHAN (*with a smile*): Which you were not—when there was fighting.

[*As they speak, MISHAEL comes out of the tent. He stands listening.*

ZITHRI: I was better employed. As it chanced, we won. And now there is a movement in the camp towards the gods of men as they are, I see it out. But I was back upon our tracks, conversing with merchants from Egypt. We may return—upon terms.

MISHAEL (*scornfully*): So that is where you would be, brother—back in Egypt!

ZITHRI (*turning to him defiantly*): Rather than here, a plant cut off from its roots.

MISHAEL: Your fathers came out of Ur of the Chaldees.

ZITHRI: So they say to us. But what do I know? My father, and his father, and his father's father, were born in Egypt. And we were lured away to die.

MISHAEL: A plant indeed cut off from its roots. A sickly growth—a poor weed. Beware the pruner, Zithri!

ZITHRI (*hotly*): He will need no knife, if we heed your counsel. The sun will rise up in the morning on a field of dry stalks. In Egypt, at least we were secure. If we laboured, we had return for our labour. If we were oppressed, we knew the measure of our oppression. A little longer, and we had become Egyptians: we had been members of a gifted and prosperous community. Here we are cut off in a barren wilderness. How long can we survive! What is this mad story of a promise to our fathers? See its fulfilment! Generation after generation shall witness the might of Egypt, the glory of her Pharaohs, the stability of her gods. While as for us, who will have heard of the children of Israel, blotted out from the book of life!

MISHAEL: It is that your new god promises—extinction. You sacrifice to the cow—yourself, oh Zithri.

ZITHRI: I would fainer sacrifice, than be sacrificed. But trust Zithri to live!

[*Laughing offensively.*]

MISHAEL: You are unclean. . . . And you, Elzaphan: have you nothing to say?

ELZAPHAN: Nothing—for I know nothing.

MISHAEL: You too are content to laugh a little, and then die?

ELZAPHAN: Not so! I care not for laughter, unless it be the laughter of children. But I would make life rich and beautiful. I cannot speak all my desire.

MISHAEL: How will you attain your desire?

ELZAPHAN: Ah, if I knew that!

MISHAEL: Dotage! Pitiful in age, contemptible in youth. Where is your spirit, where is your memory? After all that God wrought for Abraham, for Isaac, and for Jacob! Have you forgotten the wonders done in Egypt?



ELZAPHAN: I have not forgotten.

MISHAEL: Have you forgotten Moses?

ELZAPHAN: No.

ZITHRI: He might have excuse. Where is Moses, who brought us into this gracious land, where even beasts fear to dwell!

MISHAEL (*troubled*): He will return.

ZITHRI: Forty days and forty nights we have waited for him. Asses that we are, tethered in sand, wanting one shake of the head to be free. Is Moses dead? Has he abandoned us?

MISHAEL: He will descend on you, abandoned. Dread that hour.

ZITHRI: So says Mishael! For me, hark!—the hour of dancing (*as sounds reach them of the procession circling back*). You will be waiting still when death overtakes you. (*Turning towards the music*) Hathor, Hathor, horned moon!

MISHAEL: Harlotry! Your father dies.

ELZAPHAN (*distressed, to MISHAEL*): Say not so, Mishael! He has not blessed us. . . .

MISHAEL: Say, cursed, that son of his goes after Hathor. His mind is wandering: he will sink with the sun.

ELZAPHAN (*to ZITHRI*): Stay, brother; be seemly.

ZITHRI: They are coming this way.

[*The procession of the Golden Calf crosses the stage. It is a small image, carried high. Its devotees, like dancing dervishes, whirl about the calf, beating cymbals, flourishing knives. AARON is not among them; presumably he watches the event of his concession from some personal distance, ready to disclaim idolatry if it should fail. In MOSES' absence his party is outnumbered, but many wait only for his return.*]

DEVOTEES: Hathor, see us; Hathor, hear us! Hathor, Hathor!

MISHAEL (*loudly*): Hear, Jehovah, how they pollute thy people!

DEVOTEES (*arrested*): Jehovah ? . . . Hathor, Hathor ! . . . Oh, Jehovah (*jeering*), speak, Jehovah ! . . . Who is like to Hathor ! . . . Jehovah, ah, Jehovah, oh !

MISHAEL: Smite them, Jehovah !

DEVOTEES: Smite, smite ? . . . Who is this ? . . . Down—a sacrifice ! . . . Hathor . . . sacrifice !

[MISHAEL stands proudly, courting death. ELZAPHAN puts himself boldly beside his brother. ZITHRI slips among the devotees. They are advancing with murderous intention when a man comes running, with foam on his lips.

THE MAN: Moses—Moses—Moses !

[He runs on, his voice dying away hoarsely.

DEVOTEES (*in confusion*): Moses ! . . . Run !—follow him ! . . . Moses ? Where ! . . . Hathor ! . . . Moses ! . . . Seek Aaron ! . . . Aaron, Aaron ! . . . (*One, more resolute than the rest, drowns other voices*): What then, Moses ? Let us come to Moses, let him praise Hathor ! Oh Moses, ah Moses, fall down Moses ! Hathor, conceiver ; Hathor, abundance ; Hathor, of the pastures ! Out of the wilderness, out ! On, with Hathor !

DEVOTEES (*forgetting MISHAEL*): Hathor, Hathor ! To Moses !

[They press on, more wildly dancing and shouting. ZITHRI hesitates, then follows.

MISHAEL: Idolators !

ELZAPHAN: Nay, brother, rail not—rather pity them.

MISHAEL: Pity ! What is this pity of yours ?

ELZAPHAN: It is understanding.

MISHAEL: Weakness. Authority—that is understanding. A stern Law, admitting no exceptions. May Moses bring it !

ELZAPHAN: A wise, admitting men !

MISHAEL: Pah !—you should have gone with Zithri. You are like the rest of them : you have no faith.

ELZAPHAN: I have faith in my brothers—even Zithri. If we could touch their hearts. . . .

[*A voice calls from within the tent.*

VOICE: My sons !

MISHAEL: Our father is calling.

VOICE: Let me see the sun.

[*MISHAEL and ELZAPHAN go into the tent, presently emerging carrying UZZIEL, who sits in a rude chair of sticks and skins. They set him down before the tent. UZZIEL is very old, infirm, nearly blind. His sons stand on either side of him.*

UZZIEL: I shall die when the sun has set. But first I would see Moses. . . .

MISHAEL: Soon, my father. One has summoned him.

UZZIEL: Where is Zithri ?

MISHAEL: Shall I lie to my father in his last hours ?

[*Kneeling beside him.*

UZZIEL: Three sons I had, and one is not.

ELZAPHAN: Bless them that remain, my father !

UZZIEL: Moses ! I see Moses coming into the camp. What is that shouting ?

[*A confused uproar comes from the centre of the camp.*

MISHAEL (*itching to be gone*): The sun is not yet set. . . . Shall I go, father ?

UZZIEL (*rising in his chair, hearing, and seeing in his mind*): Too late ! Anger, and blood. . . . (*In loud, ringing tones*) A cry—  
“ Who is on the Lord’s side ? ”

MISHAEL: My sword !

[*He runs into the tent.*

UZZIEL (*falling back*): So must I die. . . .

ELZAPHAN: Father, look up ! It is Elzaphan.

UZZIEL: Three sons I had, and two are not (*he closes his eyes*).

ELZAPHAN: Yea, three there are. Do not die till you have aid hands on all !

MISHAEL (*emerging from the tent, sword in hand*): “ Who is on the Lord’s side—who ! ”

ELZAPHAN (*starting up*): See ! Our father dies !

MISHAEL: Would he die with none of his name doing the Lord's work ? Father ! (*bending over UZZIEL*). He does not answer. . . . His mind is gone.

[*As he stands in doubt, the cry that UZZIEL has heard rises loud and imperative.*]

VOICES: Levi, Levi ! On the Lord's side ! Levi !

MISHAEL (*brandishing his sword*): For the Lord ! For Jehovah !

[*He runs to join in the slaughter that is beginning.*]

SHELOMITH *returns, frightened, holding her hands over her ears.*

SHELOMITH: Oh, Elzaphan !

ELZAPHAN: Hush (*pointing to UZZIEL*). Stay with me—do not fear.

SHELOMITH: He is dead ?

ELZAPHAN: I think he lives. Let me speak with him. (*He puts SHELOMITH a little aside, and bends again over UZZIEL.*) Father, do you hear me ?

UZZIEL: I hear . . . I hear the wrath of Moses, and the cry of them that kill. Brother against brother. . . . Wherefore, as I die in the wilderness, all this generation shall die. . . . A vision of the Promised Land—then darkness . . . Elzaphan ?

ELZAPHAN (*weeping*): He speaks, he holds your hand ! We must die in the wilderness ? Oh, father, it was your blessing I asked ! Let us not die !

UZZIEL: Who is on Death's side—who ?

ELZAPHAN: Not I, not I ! Oh, my heart is in revolt. Truly I fear God and would do his will. But I would have men dwell in peace with their neighbours—every man to his own pastures, with his wife and his little ones. Was not man made to love woman, to love his kind ? See, I am your son ! Must we be driven to that life where there is no study, nor gentle industry, nor love of woman—to die in the desert, seeing our children die ? Revoke it, my father ! For if we be not blessed I am no longer of Israel. A little space among

strangers—that will I seek, to forget my father's people, and find peace. Ah, forgive me. Though it be in your last agony I must speak. I could not part from you with this secret on my soul !

UZZIEL : There is a woman in your voice. Where is she ?

ELZAPHAN (*beckoning her to his side*) : Behold her.

UZZIEL : Come close to me, maiden, that I may see you. (*She kneels at his feet, he opening his eyes to look long and searchingly at her.*) The sun is setting (*falling back again*) ; I am very near to death.

ELZAPHAN : One word to us, one word !

UZZIEL : I would fain have seen my three sons before me. . . .

ELZAPHAN : Hold death away—they will soon be here.

UZZIEL : Nay, Zithri is no more. And by his brother's hand.

. . .

[*Out of a passing wave of slaughter MISHAEL returns, sword in hand, beating his forehead.*]

ELZAPHAN : Mishael ! Where is Zithri ?

MISHAEL : Do not ask me. Moses came into the camp, bearing tables of the Law. He cast them down in anger, breaking them. Whereupon——!

[*He throws his sword on the ground.*]

UZZIEL (*in a loud cry of reproach*) : Moses—Moses ! Was it for this you spoke with God ?

MISHAEL (*escaping from his deed*) : But the Law shall be rewritten ! Jehovah's word is living, not of stone. Enough now of division, turmoil and dispute—enough ! (*Shuddering*) The way we shall go, right and wrong, set down in plain language. Let him who is faithful, mark ; let him who denies be cut off. Cut off—son, or wife—or brother ! What is done is done ; we are washed in blood. Henceforth, a standard ! Was I not justified ? The new Tables of the Law, set up, and none left to question !

UZZIEL : The Tables, broken in the hour of their delivery !—Broken by murder at a brother's hand.

MISHAEL : The wicked must suffer : it is so written.



UZZIEL: Much has yet to be written. . . . I die.

ELZAPHAN: You have not blessed us.

UZZIEL: Draw near . . . Mishael, my firstborn, you shall live by the Law of Moses your Master, and by that law you shall die, you and your seed.

MISHAEL (*in anger and fear*): Is this my blessing?

UZZIEL: You shall not enter the Promised Land . . . Elzaphan, my second-born, your seed shall pass beyond the law: they shall dwell in the Land for ever.

MISHAEL: My younger brother, set before me? . . . None is beyond the Law!

UZZIEL: The voice of Levi! Instrument of cruelty is in his habitation: he shall be divided in Jacob, and scattered in Israel. . . . Moses! man of might! Ages shall ring your praise, and live your law. It shall lead us far from Egypt, into strange countries. Hated, who returns hate for hate, fearful, who sows fear, Israel shall wander—seeking still the Land, unconquerable in his faith and in the Law. Hate and fear—they are all about us, like the waters of the flood: in hate and fear shall nation upon nation be drowned. But as the ark of Noah floated upon the waters, driven this way and that, so in the ark of Moses shall Israel be preserved. . . . I am blind. Is Moses here?

MISHAEL: Where Israel stands faithful to the Law (*with stubborn pride*), there too is Moses.

UZZIEL: Faith and Law—these are not enough. (*Then, more loudly*) Thou shalt see the land far off—that land which is all the earth, man reconciled to man. Against that time, break again thy Tables, Moses, but no more in anger. . . . Lift me.

ELZAPHAN (*supporting him*): Father, oh father—

UZZIEL: Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed! I do set my bow in the cloud. . . .

[*He falls back, expiring. The blowing of ram's horns announces the victory of MOSES.*]

“Saki” (H. H. Munro)

THE DEATH-TRAP

*A Play*

## CHARACTERS

DIMITRI – reigning Prince of Kedaria

DR. STRONETZ

COL. GIRNITZA

MAJOR VONTIEFF

CAPTAIN SHULTZ

} Officers of the Kranitzki Regiment of  
Guards

This play is taken from *The Square Egg*, published by Messrs. John Lane, The Bodley Head, Ltd., 8 Bury Place, London, W.C.1, at 3s 6d. net.

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SCENE: *An Ante-chamber in the Prince's Castle at Tzern.*

TIME: *The Present Day. The scene opens about ten o'clock in the evening.*

*An ante-chamber, rather sparsely furnished. Some rugs of Balkan manufacture on the walls. A narrow table in centre of room, another table set with wine bottles and goblets near window, R. Some high-backed chairs set here and there round room. Tiled stove, L. Door in centre.*

GIRNITZA, VONTIEFF and SHULTZ are talking together as curtain rises.

GIRNITZA: The Prince suspects something: I can see it in his manner.

SHULTZ: Let him suspect. He'll know for certain in half an hour's time.

GIRNITZA: The moment the Andrieff Regiment has marched out of the town we are ready for him.

SHULTZ (*drawing revolver from case and aiming it at an imaginary person*): And then—short shrift for your Royal Highness! I don't think many of my bullets will go astray.

GIRNITZA: The revolver was never a favourite weapon of mine. I shall finish the job with this.

[*Half draws his sword and sends it back into its scabbard with a click.*]

VONTIEFF: Oh, we shall do for him right enough. It's a pity he's such a boy, though. I would rather we had a grown man to deal with.

GIRNITZA: We must take our chance when we can find it. Grown men marry and breed heirs and then one has to massacre a whole family. When we've killed this boy we've killed the last of the dynasty, and laid the way clear for Prince Karl. As long as there was one of this brood left our good Karl could never win the throne.

VONTIEFF: Oh, I know this is our great chance. Still I wish the boy could be cleared out of our path by the finger of Heaven rather than by our hands.

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For permission to perform this play, application must be made to the League of British Dramatists, 84 Drayton Gardens, London, S.W.10.

SHULTZ: Hush ! Here he comes.

[Enter, by door, centre, PRINCE DIMITRI, in undress cavalry uniform. He comes straight into room, begins taking cigarette out of a case, and looks coldly at the three officers.]

DIMITRI: You needn't wait.

[They bow and withdraw, SHULTZ going last and staring insolently at the PRINCE. He seats himself at table, centre. As door shuts he stares for a moment at it, then suddenly bows his head on his arms in attitude of despair. . . . A knock is heard at the door. DIMITRI leaps to his feet. Enter STRONETZ in civilian attire.]

DIMITRI (*eagerly*): Stronetz ! My God, how glad I am to see you !

STRONETZ: One wouldn't have thought so, judging by the difficulty I had in gaining admission. I had to invent a special order to see you on a matter of health. And they made me give up my revolver; they said it was some new regulation.

DIMITRI (*with a short laugh*): They have taken away every weapon I possess, under some pretext or another. My sword has gone to be reset, my revolver is being cleaned, my hunting-knife has been mislaid.

STRONETZ (*horrified*): My God, Dimitri ! You don't mean—— ?

DIMITRI: Yes, I do. I am trapped. Since I came to the throne three years ago as a boy of fourteen I have been watched and guarded against this moment, but it has caught me unawares.

STRONETZ: But your guards !

DIMITRI: Did you notice the uniforms ? The Kranitzki Regiment. They are heart and soul for Prince Karl; the artillery are equally disaffected. The Andrieff Regiment was the only doubtful factor in their plans, and it marches out to camp to-night. The Lonyadi Regiment comes in to relieve it an hour or so later.

STRONETZ: They are loyal, surely ?

DIMITRI: Yes, but their loyalty will arrive an hour or so too late.



STRONETZ: Dimitri ! You mustn't stay here to be killed ! You must get out quick !

DIMITRI: My dear good Stronetz, for more than a generation the Karl faction have been trying to stamp our line out of existence. I am the last of the lot: do you suppose that they are going to let me slip out of their claws now ? They're not so damned silly.

STRONETZ: But this is awful ! You sit there and talk as if it were a move in a chess game.

DIMITRI (*rising*): Oh, Stronetz ! If you knew how I hate death ! I'm not a coward, but I do so want to live. Life is so horribly fascinating when one is young, and I've tasted so little of it yet. (*Goes to window.*) Look out of the window at that fairyland of mountains with the forest running up and down all over it. You can just see Grodovitz where I shot all last autumn, up there on the left, and far away beyond it all is Vienna. Were you ever in Vienna, Stronetz ? I've only been there once, and it seemed like a magic city to me. And there are other wonderful cities in the world that I've never seen. Oh, I do so want to live. Think of it, here I am alive and talking to you, as we've talked dozens of times in this grey old room, and to-morrow a fat stupid servant will be washing up a red stain in that corner—I think it will probably be in that corner.

[*He points to corner near stove, L.*]

STRONETZ: But you mustn't be butchered in cold blood like this, Dimitri. If they've left you nothing to fight with I can give you a drug from my case that will bring you a speedy death before they can touch you.

DIMITRI: Thanks, no, old chap. You had better leave before it begins; they won't touch you. But I won't drug myself. I've never seen anyone killed before, and I shan't get another opportunity.

STRONETZ: Then I won't leave you; you can see two men killed while you are about it.

[*A band is heard in distance playing a march.*]

DIMITRI: The Andrieff Regiment marching out ! Now they won't waste much time ! (*He draws himself up tense in corner by stove.*) Hush, they are coming !

STRONETZ (*rushing suddenly towards DIMITRI*): Quick ! An idea ! Tear open your tunic !

[*He unfastens DIMITRI's tunic and appears to be testing his heart. The door swings open and the three officers enter. STRONETZ waves a hand commanding silence, and continues his testing. The officers stare at him.*

GIRNITZA : Dr. Stronetz, will you have the goodness to leave the room ? We have some business with His Royal Highness. Urgent business, Dr. Stronetz.

STRONETZ (*facing round*) : Gentlemen, I fear my business is more grave. I have the saddest of duties to perform. I know you would all gladly lay down your lives for your Prince, but there are some perils which even your courage cannot avert.

GIRNITZA (*puzzled*) : What are you talking of, sir ?

STRONETZ : The Prince sent for me to prescribe for some disquieting symptoms that have declared themselves. I have made my examination. My duty is a cruel one. . . . I cannot give him six days to live !

[*DIMITRI sinks into chair near table in pretended collapse. The officers turn to each other, nonplussed.*

GIRNITZA : You are certain ? It is a grave thing you are saying. You are not making any mistake ?

STRONETZ (*laying his hand on DIMITRI's shoulder*) : Would to God I were !

[*The officers again turn, whispering to each other.*

GIRNITZA : It seems our business can wait.

VONTIEFF (*to DIMITRI*) : Sire, this is the finger of Heaven.

DIMITRI (*brokenly*) : Leave me.

[*They salute and slowly withdraw. DIMITRI slowly raises his head, then springs to his feet, rushes to door and listens, then turns round jubilantly to STRONETZ.*

DIMITRI : Spoofed them ! Ye gods, that was an idea, Stronetz !

STRONETZ (*who stands quietly looking at DIMITRI*) : It was not altogether an inspiration, Dimitri. A look in your eyes suggested it. I had seen men who were stricken with a mortal disease look like that.

DIMITRI: Never mind what suggested it, you have saved me. The Lonyadi Regiment will be here at any moment and Girnitzza's gang daren't risk anything then. You've fooled them, Stronetz, you've fooled them.

STRONETZ (*sadly*): Boy, I haven't fooled them. . . . (DIMITRI *stares at him for a long moment.*) It was a real examination I made while those brutes were waiting there to kill you. It was a real report I made; the malady is there.

DIMITRI (*slowly*): Was it *all* true, what you told them?

STRONETZ: It was all true. You have not six days to live.

DIMITRI (*bitterly*): Death has come twice for me in one evening. I'm afraid he must be in earnest. (*Passionately*) Why didn't you let them kill me? That would have been better than this "to-be-left-till-called-for" business. (*Paces across to window, R., and looks out. Turns suddenly.*) Stronetz! You offered me a way of escape from a cruel death just now. Let me escape now from a crueller one. I am a monarch. I won't be kept waiting by death. Give me that little bottle.

[STRONETZ *hesitates, then draws out a small case, extracts bottle and gives it to him.*

STRONETZ: Four or five drops will do what you ask for.

DIMITRI: Thank you. And now, old friend, good-bye. Go quickly. You've seen me just a little brave—I may not keep it up. I want you to remember me as being brave. Good-bye, best of friends, go.

[STRONETZ *wrings his hand and rushes from the room with his face hidden in his arm. The door shuts. DIMITRI looks for a moment after his friend. Then he goes quickly over to side table and uncorks wine bottle. He is about to pour some wine into a goblet when he pauses as if struck by a new idea. He goes to door, throws it open and listens, then calls, "GIRNITZA, VONTIEFF, SHULTZ!" Darting back to the table he pours the entire phial of poison into the wine bottle, and thrusts phial into his pocket. Enter the three officers.*

DIMITRI (*pouring the wine into four goblets*): The Prince is dead—long live the Prince! (*He seats himself.*) The old feud must be healed now, there is no one left of my family to keep it in, Prince Karl must succeed. Long life to Prince Karl!

Gentlemen of the Kranitzki Guards, drink to your future sovereign.

*[The three officers drink after glancing at each other.]*

GIRNITZA: Sire, we shall never serve a more gallant Prince than your Royal Highness.

DIMITRI: That is true, because you will never serve another Prince. Observe, I drink fair!

*[Drains goblet.]*

GIRNITZA: What do you mean, never serve another Prince?

DIMITRI (*rises*): I mean that I am going to march into the next world at the head of my Kranitzki Guards. You came in here to-night to kill me. (*They all start.*) You found that Death had forestalled you. I thought it a pity that the evening should be wasted, so I've killed *you*, that's all!

SHULTZ: The wine! He's poisoned us!

*[VONTIEFF seizes the bottle, and examines it. SHULTZ smells his empty goblet.]*

GIRNITZA: Ah! Poisoned!

*[He draws his sword and makes a step towards DIMITRI, who is sitting on the edge of the centre table.]*

DIMITRI: Oh, certainly, if you wish it. I'm due to die of disease in a few days and of poison in a minute or two, but if you like to take a little extra trouble about my end, please yourself.

*[GIRNITZA reels and drops sword on table and falls back into chair groaning. SHULTZ falls across table and VONTIEFF staggers against wall. At that moment a lively march is heard approaching.]*

*DIMITRI seizes the sword and waves it.*

DIMITRI: Aha! the Lonyadi Regiment marching in! My good loyal Kranitzki Guards shall keep me company into the next world. God save the Prince! (*Laughs wildly.*) Colonel Girnitza, I never thought death . . . could be . . . so amusing.

*[He falls dying to the ground.]*

CURTAIN

F. Sladen-Smith

AN ASSYRIAN AFTERNOON

*A Play*



## CHARACTERS

KATUN

KOTSA

GAMUF

BOONIK

TAGAN

SCENE: *A terrace looking out over the plain. Nothing of the plain can be seen. Only a bright blue sky with the white terrace gleaming in front. As the curtain rises a harsh chanting is heard from below.*

VOICES (*chanting*):

Nail and hammer and hammer and nail.  
Work without stopping, work without fail.  
The doom approaches, the stars grow pale,  
Nail and hammer, hammer and nail.

A YOUNG GIRL'S VOICE: Katun ! Why don't you climb up and look at the plain in the afternoon light ?

[*She enters from the steps on the left. She is pretty in rather a serious way, and very simply dressed.*

KATUN (*his handsome head appearing*): Because I am so lazy, that's why.

GIRL: If you have come thus far you may as well come farther.

KATUN: It is sure to be draughty up there.

GIRL: It is as hot here as anywhere ; surely a draught would be a blessing.

KATUN (*coming slowly on to the stage ; he is also young, but not so quick-witted as the girl*): A draught is never a blessing.

GIRL (*looking at him admiringly*): And you a soldier !

KATUN: My dear Kotsa, the enormous advantage of being a soldier is that no one believes in your weaknesses. Consequently, you can have as many as you like. (*Looking over the terrace*) I see they are still at it.

KOTSA: What does it all mean ?

KATUN: Mean ? Well, there have been a good many theories as to what it means, but I think it means that there are many lunatics in the world. However, we all know that.

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All applications for permission to perform this play must be made to the author, c/o The League of British Dramatists, 84 Drayton Gardens, London, S.W.10; or, for Canada and the U.S.A., to the Baker International Play Bureau, 178 Tremont Street, Boston, Mass., or 448 South Hill Street, Los Angeles.

The play is published by Messrs. Gowans and Gray, Ltd., at 1s. net, and may be obtained from Messrs. Samuel French.

KOTSA: But the lunatics down there must have terrific convictions. They have been making that thing for months and months.

KATUN: And an awful-looking object it will be when they have finished.

KOTSA: Of course, it is a kind of boat.

KATUN: A boat on dry land! Whoever heard of such a thing.

KOTSA: But perhaps they intend to get it to the lake.

KATUN: How do you suppose they can get a thing like that to the lake? No, my dear, they are quite mad; the old father, the old lady, the huge, repulsive sons, all mad. But I wouldn't be without them. They give us something to talk about. The whole city has talked of nothing else for ages.

KOTSA: Do you know, Katun, I wish you were not always wanting something to talk about. Why not just enjoy life without so much talk? I know I shall bore you one day! All my conversation will go and we shall be silent like statues, with you hating me because I am so dull.

*[She cries a little.]*

KATUN (*taking her in his arms*): I shall never, never hate you, my little lamb. You will never bore me. We shall live together always as happy and as free as clouds.

KOTSA: And we haven't seen a cloud for ages.

KATUN: What's that to do with it?

KOTSA: Nothing; but when one is happy all manner of little thoughts come to one for no reason.

KATUN: And are you happy?

KOTSA (*snuggling close to him*): Oh, immensely. You are so strong, so beautiful!

*[Hides herself in his arms.]*

*Enter GAMUF, old and cynical, although good nature breaks in at intervals.*

GAMUF: Don't let me disturb you. I am used enough to love-making—most people do nothing else. It must be the hot weather. Proceed further if you wish; nothing shocks me.

KATUN (*releasing KOTSA quickly*): You're a coarse-minded old fool. Those who love truly, love beautifully.

GAMUF: I see you are both very callow. (*Looking over terrace*) Ah, they are still busy at the absurdity. Is it a symbol of some kind, do you think?

KATUN: There are people who consider it is going to be a temple.

GAMUF: It doesn't look much like one; but one never knows. Religion, when it gets hold of people, always drives them silly. Thank heaven, I never had any religion. Even when young I escaped it—but then, to be sure, this is not a religious age.

KATUN: It will be if the water famine increases. Any kind of distress makes people believe in gods.

GAMUF: True; suffering and piety seem to be inseparable.

[*Enter BOONIK, a plump, middle-aged woman, rather overdressed and painted.*]

BOONIK: How can you talk about suffering on a beautiful day like this!

GAMUF: But we have had so many beautiful days.

KOTSA: I cannot remember when it last rained.

BOONIK: Let us hope it will never rain again.

[*Sits down on right.*]

KATUN: But think of the poor farmers.

GAMUF: The poor farmers are never satisfied and never will be. You can as easily satisfy a farmer as a——

BOONIK: Yes, I know exactly what you are going to say, Gamuf, but please remember that despite middle age I am still very much a woman, while we have our little Kotsa here, blooming as ever, to rebuke you further.

KOTSA: But no one takes any notice of Gamuf; the more he talks the less it means.

GAMUF: If you listened more to me, my dear, and less to your handsome soldier, you would be a much more interesting little girl.

KATUN: You are old enough to command respect, Gamuf, but please do not insult my Kotsa.

BOONIK: Don't let us quarrel on a glorious day like this. Let us be perfectly happy, and enjoy the wonderful life we have had given us. I must say I have enjoyed my life up to now immensely.

[*Chant:*

Nail and hammer and hammer and nail.  
Work without stopping, work without fail.  
The doom approaches, the stars grow pale,  
Nail and hammer, hammer and nail.

GAMUF: How they croak! That's the worst of religion. It makes one so extremely uncomfortable and dissatisfied. I understand that they are building this affair because there is something wrong with the earth. I don't wonder they are unhappy if they think that.

BOONIK: I expect they are perfectly happy in their own way; most people are far more contented than they are willing to admit, take my word for it.

GAMUF: Probably there's a good deal of truth in that. But those creatures down there are so repulsive they scarcely deserve happiness. (*Enter TAGAN.*) My good Tagan, surely you're more overdressed than usual?

TAGAN (*young, gushing, and elegant*): Because I'm so happy! The sun, the air, the continual fine weather! I could float to the skies, I feel so light and so full of magic qualities. Do admire me, everybody. I know I look almost too wonderful.

BOONIK: Tagan, I'm not sure you're good for prosaic people like me.

TAGAN: But how delightful of you to say so! (*Looking over terrace*) They will finish to-day?

KATUN: Everyone says so—there can't be much more to do. The whole hideous building is complete . . . and about time. Have you ever seen anything quite so tasteless?

GAMUF: I wonder what all those vast wooden boxes are, drawn up at the sides. I tried to get near yesterday, but some of his beastly sons drove me away.

KOTSA: Well, we shall soon know. They are going towards them and opening them.

BOONIK (*rising*): Really? You force me to leave a comfortable seat.



GAMUF: I believe little Kotsa is right for once. They are certainly opening them.

KATUN: Cease to insult my little Kotsa, I tell you.

GAMUF: Your silly little Kotsa can bear with an old man for some moments when she has you ogling her all day long.

TAGAN: Instead of talking you would be better employed watching. After all, there must be something in those boxes.

BOONIK: There is. Lions !

GAMUF: Oh, nonsense.

KOTSA: Boonik is right. Look ; lions !

TAGAN: Of course, they are even more crazy than we thought.

GAMUF: Lions and tigers.

KOTSA: Giraffes !

KATUN: Camels !

TAGAN: Leopards !

BOONIK: Elephants !

GAMUF: What are those hairy things ?

TAGAN: Goodness knows. And look at the monkeys—disgusting ! The boxes were cages ; all the animals in the world seem to have been in them. Heavens, what a crowd has gathered below watching.

BOONIK: Naturally ; you don't get a sight like this every day.

KATUN: If I were not off duty, it would be my task to keep that crowd in order. But I see Yodal and Ackbal are doing it—pretty well too.

*[From now onwards, in addition to the noise of the workmen, the air is filled with the yapping and trumpeting of animals.]*

GAMUF: I'm losing count of all these creatures.

BOONIK: I'm sure there are many I've never heard of.

GAMUF: And a good many I don't want to hear of !

TAGAN: How on earth did the old man get hold of them ?

GAMUF: A religious maniac can do anything.

BOONIK: Do you think he requires them for some sacrifice ?

TAGAN: My dear Boonik, you couldn't possibly sacrifice all those animals in a thousand æons.

BOONIK: But there must be some meaning behind it.

GAMUF: There is as much meaning behind it as there is behind this fine weather. It just is, and that's enough. After all, why try to find meanings? Life is amusing—why should you want more?

TAGAN: I could watch this for ever.

BOONIK: I notice that the workmen do not stop despite the beasts.

KATUN: No, the old man sees to that.

GAMUF: They're simply hurling the poor creatures into the building. I wonder what happens to them once they're inside.

TAGAN: There must be a genius for organization behind all this, you know.

KATUN: That will be the old man.

BOONIK: Why not the old woman?

KOTSA: Yes, Katun, why not the old woman?

GAMUF: We all know perfectly well that women have neither sense nor method.

KATUN: Cease to insult my little Kotsa.

BOONIK: Or your little Boonik either, if it comes to that. You may be sure the old woman has had more of a hand in this than you imagine.

GAMUF: The fun increases.

[*Chant:*

Nail and hammer and hammer and nail.  
Work without ceasing, work without fail.  
The doom approaches, the stars grow pale,  
Nail and hammer, hammer and nail.

KOTSA: What do they mean about a doom?

GAMUF: All religion concerns itself with some kind of doom; it wouldn't flourish otherwise. How anyone can sing about doom on such a marvellous day as this is beyond me.

KOTSA: But is it such a marvellous day?

KATUN: What do you mean?

KOTSA: I don't know. I caught a chill in the air.

KATUN: Nonsense.

TAGAN: It's all this singing and those fearful beasts. They would depress anybody.

BOONIK: Nevertheless, I don't think the day is as bright as it was.

GAMUF: It may be clouding over a bit, but I can see nothing.

KOTSA: No, the sky is as blue as ever, I agree, but—(*turns round*)—oh!

BOONIK: What is the matter?

KOTSA: Look behind us! A great black cloud!

[*All turn and look.*

*Chant:*

Nail and hammer and hammer and nail.

Work without ceasing, work without fail.

The doom approaches, the stars grow pale,

Nail and hammer, hammer and nail.

GAMUF: That cloud has come up very suddenly.

KATUN: It looks as if we may have some rain at last.

BOONIK: Anyway, it will please the poor farmers.

GAMUF: I tell you nothing will please the wretched farmers.

KOTSA: Ought we to go in?

TAGAN: Oh, no, not yet. It will only be a shower, and the house is near. Let us watch them below as long as we can.

GAMUF: I wonder if the old man knew it was going to rain.

BOONIK: I don't see how he could. All the weather prophets said there would be no rain for ages.

TAGAN: Perhaps that convinced him.

KATUN: It's wonderful how they manage those streams of beasts.

BOONIK: I told you it would be the old woman; look, I can see her directing matters while the old man gives the finishing touches to the boat—if it is a boat.

KOTSA : What else could it be, Boonik ?

GAMUF : What is the use of a boat full of animals ?

BOONIK : I know. They're probably going to make a charge and let people in to inspect the beasts.

TAGAN : Won't they rake in the money !

KATUN : That must be it. I never thought of that. Brilliant Boonik ! Trust a woman to find out what anything means.

BOONIK : You are a most agreeable young man, Katun. Kotsa is lucky.

GAMUF : Oh, of course, any compliment will do, provided it is a compliment. But you have failed to notice that there is only one door to the contrivance. . . .

BOONIK : Well ?

GAMUF : And that door will soon be closed.

TAGAN : But why ?

GAMUF : You know very well I cannot tell you that, but I have noticed the old man busy with the door so as to close it the moment the last beast has passed in.

TAGAN : Some are so small they have to be carried in.

GAMUF : Some of the smallest, no doubt, are on the old man already.

BOONIK : I am really glad I climbed up to-day. I would not have missed this for anything.

KOTSA : Nor me. (*A wind arises.*) It is getting quite cold.

[*Shivers.*]

KATUN : I will protect you, darling. You shall never be cold.

TAGAN : I wish you wouldn't make love in public. So bad for Boonik and me.

BOONIK : You're a very impudent young man.

TAGAN : But charming.

BOONIK : That is not so obvious as you imagine.

GAMUF : They are finishing ; look, the animals are nearly all in now.

KATUN: And the workmen have almost ceased. Listen. They will stop in a moment.

[*Chant:*

Nail and hammer and hammer and nail.  
Work without ceasing, work without fail.  
The doom approaches, the stars grow pale,  
Nail and hammer, hammer and nail.

[*Abruptly all noise ceases.*

BOONIK: It's quite creepy now it's quiet, isn't it? (*A heavy clang; all jump.*) Oh, what was that?

GAMUF: That was the door; they have gone in. It is all over.

KOTSA: It is all over.

BOONIK: It is all over.

[*The wind arises; it grows dark.*

KOTSA: Katun, come close to me.

KATUN: But why?

KOTSA: I am afraid, I don't know why. The silence, the cloud; see how black it is!

BOONIK: It is certainly not so cheerful as it was. I am going into the house for a good meal.

TAGAN: And I go with you. A meal in your delightful house should never be missed.

GAMUF: Boonik and Tagan are right. We need a meal to cheer us up. The show is over.

TAGAN (*descending the steps*): The show is over.

BOONIK: Yes, there is no doubt about that: the show is over.

[*Exit, followed by GAMUF.*

KOTSA (*slowly*): Katun, the show is over.

KATUN: Well, what if it is?

KOTSA; Katun, hold me fast. If you hold me I shall not be terrified. We do not understand any of this; we never shall. That huge, ugly boat, those terrible men who built it, that ferocious old man and his animals, all ugly, cruel, and mysterious. This black cloud, the end of our happy days, the end of the bright, sunny weather that made us think the world so safe a place. We shall never understand—just as in



ages to come thousands will never understand when a doom overtakes them.

KATUN: A doom?

KOTSA: They will never understand, but it will make no difference. It will not alter anything. But in the happy days which even now seem so far away we had our love, and now, whatever happens, whatever doom that ugly boat may signify and this hideous cloud may bring us, we shall still have our love. No cloud can extinguish that nor any ugly boat take it away.

KATUN: Kotsa, my little Kotsa, you are not well.

KOTSA: Yes, dear, I am, but sometimes the women you despise see further than men. We cannot understand, we can only submit; somewhere there may be pity for us all, but not here, not here.

KATUN: It's beginning to rain. It looks as if it will be a heavy shower.

KOTSA: Yes, Katun, it's going to be a heavy shower. Love me, love me, Katun! Even to the end.

KATUN: I am so sorry, but I'm afraid I do not know what you mean.

*[Begins to lead her into the house.]*

KOTSA: But soon that will matter so little, dear.

*[Embraced, they leave the stage. The rain begins in good earnest.]*

CURTAIN

A. J. Talbot

BAILEY'S CROWDED HOUR

*A Comedy*

## CHARACTERS

BAILEY – door-keeper at a cinema

MISS WITHERS – cashier

MIRIAM GOLDSPINK } attendants

HELEN

MR. HYAMS – manager of the cinema

GEORGE

BERT

UG – aged professor, about A.D. 102,000 (Sex uncertain;  
can be played as *m.* or *f.*)

HIG } Ug's favourite students

ONDA

TESTY – a throwback to Miriam Goldspink

Cinema patrons

A Voice

PRODUCTION NOTE: The disappearance and reappearance of Bailey in Scenes I and III can be arranged on the principle of getting the audience to look the other way. Bailey is at the extreme right, and there is a commotion L. which distracts the attention at the crucial moments. If the light is focused on the stairs, this will help.

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SCENE I: *A narrow stage against a fore-curtain, which represents a longitudinal wall of the foyer.*

*In the centre is a pay-box, through the pigeon-hole of which can be seen a glimpse of MISS WITHERS. At extreme R. is a shrub in a tub which apparently marks the entrance to the cinema seeing that BAILEY, attired as a door-keeper, is standing half in ambush beside it. To the extreme L. is a notice, "Stalls," and, preferably, a couple of shallow stairs to mark the beginnings of a staircase (off). Between this and the pay-box is a large frame of photographs under the heading "Forthcoming Attractions."*

MISS WITHERS, dressed in black, seems to be very much occupied inside her box. BAILEY and HELEN, whose post is by the stairs, are bored and listless. HELEN is wearing the costume imposed on its female attendants by this cinema, which may either be a colourful notion of how an attendant should be attired, or else it may be fancy dress to set off the big picture—circus, foreign legion, or whatever it is. BAILEY, a very handsome man in the late thirties, looks very well in exaggerated military uniform with enough in the way of gold braid, aigrettes and epaulettes to satisfy a Balkan generalissimo. He has a complete row of five medals.

*During this scene an occasional departing PATRON comes in L. by stairs, receives a leaflet from HELEN, and goes off R.*

BAILEY takes a weary turn up and down between his post and pay-box, flexes his knees, and stands hopelessly, looking R. HELEN goes on tired feet to pay-box window.

HELEN: Hullo ! Busy ?

MISS WITHERS: Yes. Don't come bothering me now, Helen.

HELEN: I only want to ask you something about that umper pattern. Is it all right to use number six needles ?

MISS WITHERS: Oh, go away ! Can't you see I'm trying to alance the takings ?

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All applications for permission to perform this play should be made to the publishers, Messrs. H. F. W. Deane & Sons, The Year Book Press, Ltd., 31 Museum Street, London, W.C.1.; or, for Canada and the U.S.A., to the Baker International Play Bureau, 178 Tremont Street, Boston, Mass., or 448 South Hill Street, Los Angeles.  
The play is to be published by Messrs. Deane at 1s. net.

HELEN: Oh, all right. (*Passes on to BAILEY.*) Doesn't the last half-hour always seem to drag?

BAILEY: What a life, just standing here. Nothing ever happens.

HELEN: Cheer up! Sunday to-morrow. A half day for us.

BAILEY: H'm.

HELEN: What's the matter with you to-night?

BAILEY: For one thing, my corn's hurting.

HELEN: Corns! Thought p'raps you'd got something on your *mind*.

BAILEY: So I have. Who gave me away last night about slipping off for a quick one?

HELEN: You surely don't think it was me?

BAILEY: Then who did? It must have been either you or her.

[*Jerks thumb in Miss WITHERS' direction.*]

HELEN: Of course it was her. I was here when the manager came, just as it might be now, and she said, "Mr. Hyams, I don't think I ought to be left alone with all this money. Anyone might come in. It isn't safe," and he said, "What do you mean, 'left alone?' " he said. "Where's Bailey?" "I don't know," she said, "and I don't think it's safe."

BAILEY: So it was *her*! And when I came back wiping the foam off my moustache, there was Mr. Hyams waiting for me. "Bailey," he says, "is this what they taught you in the Army, deserting your post?" Made me wild, that did, like being told off by the company idiot.

HELEN: You oughtn't to go off like that. It's risky.

BAILEY: I don't see the harm. Everything quiet, like it is now, showing the last ruddy picture of the last ruddy programme, and there's that nice pub over the road in full view, and so near you can hear the corks drawn. Doesn't Mr. Hyams know it closes before I knock off! Aren't I human, or am I to stand here gasping while it shuts up under my very eyes?



[MIRIAM *has entered by stairs, L. She wears same uniform as HELEN, but in addition she bears a tray of chocolates suspended from her shoulders. She drifts casually over to BAILEY and HELEN, humming a theme song. As she joins them she bursts into the words:*

. . . Who d'ya love, and why?  
Tell me, baby, dare I hope,  
Let me have the inside dope,  
Am I the guy?

HELEN: Oh, Miriam, don't sing this week's blasted theme song.

MIRIAM: Sorry. It'll ring in my head till next week's theme song drives it out.

BAILEY: Poor kid! I wouldn't have your job. Fancy having to *see* the pictures.

[*He has no eyes for HELEN now that MIRIAM has come.*

MIRIAM: Like to see what's on next week?

BAILEY: No.

MIRIAM (*pushing a leaflet into his hand*): *College Beauties.*

BAILEY (*looking at illustrations*): Beauties is right. All in their undies. Don't seem to be studying very hard. Nice legs some of them.

HELEN: It's your day off on Wednesday. Why not come and see it?

BAILEY: Not me. Somehow I don't care for the pictures.

HELEN: Where do you go to? A pub?

BAILEY: And why not? You get better dialogue in a pub. Now, look here, you girls, don't crowd round me. Mr. Hyams wouldn't like it, and it'd be me that'd get ticked off.

HELEN: Oh, all right, Clive Brook.

[HELEN *realizes that she isn't wanted. She goes back to her post by stairs. MIRIAM begins to go, but turns back.*

MIRIAM: Oh—er—it's my day off, too, on Wednesday.

BAILEY (*playfully*): Haven't you gone yet, Miss Goldspink?

MIRIAM: *Not* Miss Goldspink—call me Miriam. Couldn't we . . . go somewhere together?

BAILEY: What do you take me for—a kidnapper? Where to?

MIRIAM: Well . . . what about going to a good picture?

BAILEY: Stewth! Don't you get enough pictures?

MIRIAM: I like pictures the first three or four times I see them. I enjoy myself all day Monday, especially when we're showing a new Clark Gable, but by Thursday I begin to feel I want to scream.

[GEORGE, a tall, well-dressed man with his hat pulled down over his features, saunters in from street entrance. He glances at list of prices and programme on pay-box, and goes on to examine photographs under "Forthcoming Attractions."]

BAILEY: Look at that! A two-and-four, I bet. Comes here at this time of night to study form. Pictures! Give me waxworks.

MIRIAM (*hinting brazenly*): Do you know, I've never been to the waxworks.

BAILEY (*with a mock groan*): Oh, why don't you get yourself a boy friend? What do you want with an old buffer like me? Why, I've got a daughter near as old as you.

MIRIAM: No reason why you shouldn't be happy on your day off.

BAILEY: Happy? It's my belief no one knows what's being happy, or what we're all for. As for me, I enjoy my day off all right cleaning out my budgerigars.

[*He settles himself into his stock attitude with an air of finality.*]

MIRIAM (*moving off L.*): Well, I'd better be getting back.

In yo' eyes the love-light lurks,  
Come clean, honey, shoot the works,  
Who d'ya love, and why?

HELEN (*as MIRIAM arrives on her side*): How are you getting on with your eligible widower?

[*Indicating BAILEY.*]

MIRIAM: You're only jealous.

HELEN: I don't have to run after a man old enough to be my father.

MIRIAM: Oh? Then let me tell you——

[MR. ELIHU HYAMS *has appeared on stairs. He wears a dinner-jacket suit, heavy-rimmed glasses, and a good many rings on his hands. He has a fussy manner.*

HYAMS (*cutting into MIRIAM's speech*): What's this? Isn't your place in the auditorium?

MIRIAM (*flustered*): Yes, Mr. Hyams.

HYAMS: Then what are you doing here?

MIRIAM: Well, Mr. Hyams, it being close on time, I thought——

HYAMS: Close on time! I see what it is, you're a clock-watcher. You're paid to sell chocolate, not loaf in an empty foyer. Get back to your job.

MIRIAM: Yes, Mr. Hyams. (*She goes, L.*)

HYAMS: Why is it I can never get any co-operation from the staff? (*Through pay-box window*) Now, Miss Withers, have you balanced the takings?

MISS WITHERS: Not quite, Mr. Hyams.

HYAMS (*fretfully*): How long are you going to be?

MISS WITHERS: Not very long.

HYAMS: Well, don't be all night. And look here—Bailey can escort the money to the night safe. I'll tell him now. Bailey, Bailey, where are you? Where the devil is Bailey? Do you know where Bailey is, Miss Withers?

[BAILEY *has vanished. All that remains of him is one white glove on the floor by the shrub.*

MISS WITHERS: Isn't he on the door?

HYAMS: Should I be asking you if he was?

MISS WITHERS: He ought to be on the door.

HYAMS: I know very well where he ought to be; but where is he?

HELEN: He was there just as you came in, Mr. Hyams. There's his glove.

HYAMS: I don't want his glove. I want Bailey. I know what it is, he's slipped out for some booze right under my very eyes. I've told him about it before, I told him about it only last night, but I suppose he's trading on the fact that my patience is inexhaustible. Well, my patience isn't as inexhaustible as he thinks, and when he comes back you can tell him from me he's fired.

MISS WITHERS: Fired?

HYAMS: Fired. Sacked, if you like it better.

HELEN: Sacked?

HYAMS: Yes, and if that isn't plain, tell him that Mr. Elihu Hyams says he doesn't work here now.

[*Black out. Lights fade in to—*

SCENE II: *A clinic, one morning about A.D. 102,900.*

*A bare room, giving the impression of airiness. In the centre, against the back wall, is a formidable machine. It has a cupboard as tall as a man, with a massive handle on its door. Connected with it is an apparatus about the size and shape of a sugar-box, with a large lever and a number of switches and indicators, suggestive of a wireless set. On top, there is an exposed red electric bulb, and a sort of telescopic sight. In R. corner is something that looks like a loudspeaker.*

*Against the L. wall stands a white table on which is some impressive chemical apparatus—retort, glass jars, and tubing—containing mysterious red and green liquids. A couple of chromium chairs of severe design stand L. and R.*

HIG is discovered fiddling lovingly with the machine. HIG is to our eyes a weird creature. He—for we shall gather from his voice that he is probably a man—wears a white blouse and loose white trousers, gathered in at the ankle, of very shiny material. His massive skull is completely bald. He has no eyebrows and no teeth. His face is peaked like an old man's, but not deeply lined. His back has an acute scholar's stoop, and his legs bend under his weight.

*Enter ONDA, R., a figure similar in physique and identically dressed, except for a thing like a lady's bathing-cap, which completely covers the skull.*



ONDA: Hullo, Hig. (*She has a woman's voice.*) Always wasting time on your invention. (*Crossing to apparatus at L.*) You ought to be ashamed to allow your mind to go off on a side-track, you, the favourite assistant of Professor Ug, the pioneer of ectogenesis. Surely you should have no other thought but to help him bring forth the perfect baby from a test-tube? (*Waving dramatically at apparatus.*) To free the world from motherhood! Isn't that enough?

HIG: You talk too much.

ONDA (*scrutinizing apparatus*): Oh, you've allowed the temperature to fall dangerously. You and your invention. You haven't a thought for the child.

HIG: Look out! Here comes Professor Ug.

[*Enter PROFESSOR UG from R. His dress and general appearance are like the others, but his bald head is bigger and his back more bowed. His face is wrinkled like an apple with age. He supports himself on a stick.*]

UG: Good morning. Wonderful news! Professor Bondo tells me I am to be in the New Year's Honours List.

HIG } Oh, splendid!

ONDA } Great news! Nobody deserves it more!

UG: Quite unofficial, of course. But my name has gone to the Inner Circle for approval—a mere formality. Well, this honour is only just in time. I have reached the limit of man's allotted span, for I am a full hundred-and-fifty years old. My course is run. But now that I am to be in the Honours List, with its accompanying privilege of the gland treatment, I shall have another hundred years of working life. With my knowledge and experience, what may I not be able to accomplish in that time? (*Feeling in his hip pocket*) We ought to celebrate, I think.

HIG (*feeling in his hip*): This must be with me.

UG: No, no. (*Pulls out a pill-box and hands it round.*) I'm in the chair. A sound brand.

ONDA: Here's to intellectual triumphs in your extended life.

[*With acclamations, they take their pills in unison.*]

HIG: Would you care to look at my invention now?



UG: No. Work comes first. (*To ONDA*) I'll see experiment Number One.

[*ONDA goes out L. UG comes to apparatus.*

H'm. So far, so good. Are we going to get the perfect baby this time?

[*HIG has brought a chair and UG sits gratefully.*

Bad news from the Middle East. A tribe of nomadic submen have raided one of our settlements.

HIG (*shuddering*): What, again?

UG: Yes. Bashibazouks, I believe.

HIG (*querulously*): We aren't built to stand up against animal violence. We're too highly evolved.

UG: It's getting serious. We shall have to study the forgotten art of war. The Inner Circle must take steps.

[*Re-enter ONDA with Case Number One, or TESTY. TESTY wears the same type of costume, but in pale yellow. She has, however, the figure and carriage of a young girl of our times, looking surprisingly erect, tall and vigorous in contrast with the others. She has a quantity of hair, restrained by a bandeau. Her face is what we think a human face ought to be. She bears an exact resemblance to MIRIAM of Scene I. ONDA brings TESTY to UG, who feels her pulse and looks her over with an academic eye.*

Radiant health! A pity she was not a more successful experiment.

ONDA: Testy—er—Case Number One—wants all her teeth to be taken out.

TESTY: Yes. And my hair removed. (*UG shakes his head with an amused smile.*) But, please, I don't want to be a freak. I want to look like normal people.

UG (*tittering*): She wants to approximate to our standard of good looks. As if drawing her teeth would conceal her animal figure. (*Kindly*) Number One—Testy—you are a scientific exhibit. You are the result of my first successful attempt to produce babies in the laboratory. Some clumsiness in my first apparatus outraged Nature, and instead of the modern baby I expected, she sent you, a reversion to a

very early type of humanity. Roughly speaking, you are a throwback to the sub-men who walked the earth one hundred thousand years ago. You are like one of the women with small brain-cases of the early British Empire period. But you have nothing to be ashamed of. Although you are a half-wit of grotesque appearance, always remember that you are the first human being to be born in a test-tube, and that it would be sheer vandalism to draw your teeth and spoil you as a museum piece.

*[Rises to signify that the matter is closed. Pausing before machine.]*

Well, well. I suppose I may as well have a look at this. What's it all about?

HIG: I have taken an ordinary Beta apparatus for controlling the time-dimension. The principle of this is, of course——

ONDA: We know, we know. This is not a kindergarten.

HIG: Well, to this Beta apparatus I have succeeded in linking up one of our medium-powered standard machines for transmitting matter through space. My idea is to transport living creatures of past eras through time and space, and deposit them in that cupboard.

UG: That was always a theoretical possibility. I remember that I, myself—— But let's see what you can do.

HIG (*opening cupboard*): I have already produced in here a few inanimate objects from past ages. (*Shuts cupboard. Adjusts switches.*) Curiously enough, I got no results until I used this particular red valve. It is exactly the same as other red valves I tried, but this red valve gives results and the others don't. Why that should be I can't explain.

UG: But that's disgraceful, to get results without knowing why. Nothing ruins the brain like guessing. But go on.

HIG: To-day I will transport a human being from a past age. (*Green light shines inside box. Peering through telescopic sight*) I am setting the machine to—er—roughly A.D. 1810, primitive reckoning. Now this indicator gives us the place—where shall we say? Paris? Right, here we are. Oh, a military review! Why, that must be—who was it—the great general?

UG: My history doesn't go back to the dawn of man. Wasn't there a general called Julius Cæsar?

ONDA: Er—would it be Napoleon? That's it—Napoleon.

UG: Get him, Hig. We want a general to show us how to deal with our barbarians. Napoleon will do.

HIG: That's an idea.

*[Pulls lever. The red valve lights and a moaning whirr inside rises, falls and stops. Red light goes out. Opening cupboard door with a flourish:]*

Napoleon!

*[There is nobody in the cupboard. UG and ONDA laugh mirthlessly.]*

There's something here—a hat! Napoleon's hat!

UG *(taking hat from HIG)*: A very elusive general. *(Tries on hat. It is much too small for him.)* Hig, this is all very childish. You are wasting my time.

HIG *(setting machine rapidly)*: Napoleon must have moved. Let me try again. See, I set the machine to—er—1940.

UG: I really can't wait.

HIG: Oh, but look! I've sighted another general: I've got another general taped.

UG: Time is precious. We must get on with our work.

*[UG leads HIG and ONDA off L.]*

ONDA *(as she goes)*: Testy, you may stop here, but mind, you are not to touch anything.

*[As soon as they have gone, TESTY is drawn magnetically to the machine. Greatly daring, she turns on green light and peeps through the sight. What she sees makes her squeal with pleasure. She runs and looks, L., to make sure UG's party has gone. Returning, she pulls the lever. The red valve lights up and there is the moaning whirr, as before. When this has ceased, she goes to the cupboard door, screws up her courage, and opens it.]*

BAILEY, in a dazed condition, is standing within in his customary cinema attitude, holding one glove and a leaflet. TESTY gazes at him in awe and rapture. BAILEY shifts his weight from one leg to the other, flexes his knees, and comes to a fuller consciousness.

BAILEY: Coo, I do feel funny. (*Steps forward, shakily.*) Must have gone to sleep standing up. (*Seeing TESTY*) Hullo, has Mr. Hyams been nosing round? And what's the idea of that rig-out? To go with some film we're showing? (*TESTY remains mute and round-eyed.*) Here! Where's the pay-box gone to? And . . . and why is everything different? What's been going on, Miriam?

TESTY: My name's not Miriam.

BAILEY: Miss Goldspink, then, if you must be stand-offish.

TESTY: They call me Testy.

BAILEY: Oh? And since when have they called you Testy?

TESTY: Why, ever since I was born in a test-tube.

BAILEY: Born in a——? I don't think you ought to make jokes like that, Miriam.

TESTY: Testy. I'm Testy. And it's true. Ectogenesis, you know.

BAILEY: But I don't know. I can't make you out to-night. (*Looking round wildly*) One of us must have gone balmy.

TESTY (*coming closer*): What is your name. I like you.

BAILEY: Now don't start any of that business.

TESTY (*closer still*): You *are* a soldier, aren't you?

BAILEY: Once, I was; but never again. And what of it?

TESTY: They want a soldier for the Inner Circle.

BAILEY (*joyously*): Ah! The Inner Circle. At last we come to something solid; for if there's an Inner Circle there must be a District Railway, and if there's a District Railway I shall soon be going home to my budgerigars and sanity.

TESTY: I'm afraid you still don't understand. You are not living now when you used to.

BAILEY: Not—not—— What d'you mean? When am I living now? I wish you'd talk sense.

TESTY: You see, you have just made a long trip through space and time.

BAILEY: Oh, I have, have I? (*Decides to humour her. Putting a comforting arm round her*) Now look here, Miriam—Testy—just keep calm, take your time, and tell me all about it. Then I'll ask Mr. Hyams to send you home in a taxi.



TESTY: I'll try to explain, though I'm not clever, my skull having such a small cubic capacity. They say I'm a half-wit.

BAILEY: I'm sure you're a bright girl.

TESTY: I'm not. I'm just sub-human—like you. Well, you know matter can be sent through space by turning it into vibrations . . . ?

BAILEY (*indulgently*): Yes, yes, yes. Go on.

TESTY: And you know that the conception of the onward flow of time is merely a convenient convention to account for our sense-experience series? Events, actually, have a four-dimensional order.

BAILEY: Who said you were dull? I couldn't put it better myself.

TESTY: Briefly, then, in one combined operation you have been transported through space and brought along the fourth dimension of time. By means of that machine.

[BAILEY looks at the machine, and its appearance shakes him.

BAILEY (*changed tone*): Do you think you could tell me, my dear, exactly where I am? And *when* I am?

TESTY: The London you used to know stood here about one hundred thousand years ago.

BAILEY: One—hundred—thou—— I think I'll sit down.

[*He sits shakily R., removes his cap, and fans himself with leaflet. Babble of voices approaching, L. Enter UG's party. They stop dead in surprise on seeing BAILEY, who for his part is flabbergasted.*

'Strewth!

HIG: What's this? Have you been meddling with my machine?

TESTY: I didn't think you would mind. And look, I've got you that nice general.

ONDA: I thought I told you not to touch, Testy!

UG: Don't scold her. This is quite interesting. A fine male specimen of the era Testy threw back to. (*To BAILEY*) And how are we feeling after our little trip?



BAILEY (*rising*): Never mind how I'm feeling. What d'you mean by taking me through time and space without my leave? I consider you've taken a liberty. And now you can send me back, and look sharp about it.

UG (*feeling BAILEY's pulse*): All in good time. There's no particular hurry.

BAILEY (*snatching his hand away; wildly*): Oh, yes, there is. I've got to lock up the cinema in a few minutes.

UG: I shouldn't let that worry you. (*To others*) You observe the enormous muscular development of his torso?

BAILEY: But Mr. Hyams will be furious. And my daughter will be wondering where I've got to. And what about my budgerigars?

UG: Look at the matter philosophically. According to the calendar, Mr. Hyams, your daughter and your budgerigars all worked out their destinies about one hundred thousand years ago. (*To others*) Quite a good dolicocephalic head—for his times.

[UG's party are now round BAILEY, examining him scientifically.]

BAILEY: Don't keep pawing me.

[He brushes them off with what we should consider a slight push. It is sufficient to send UG sprawling on his face, and HIG and ONDA staggering and stumbling away.]

UG: What brute strength!

BAILEY (*seeing red*): Did I ask you to bring me here? No. It was like your brass neck. And now you can send me back, or you'll be sorry.

[Advances threateningly to the cowering HIG and ONDA.]

UG: Hig, I leave it to you to handle this situation.

[HIG advances slowly and hypnotically.]

BAILEY: Oh, you fancy your chance, do you? Come on then and take your wages. I'll break your blooming——

[BAILEY's voice stops with a jerk and he stands, stiffened, with an arm raised for a blow; for HIG has suddenly made a mesmeric pass at him, like throwing invisible dust in his eyes.]

HIG: Move to that chair. (BAILEY's legs take him, still with raised arm, to chair R.) Sit. (BAILEY's legs sit.) Now your legs have no power. Relax the upper part of your body. You can speak.

[TESTY helps UG to rise, and puts him in chair, L.

ONDA: Hig, it was lucky you took the hypnotic course. We should have been at the mercy of this animal.

UG: Well, this is a nice thing. We've got a live prehistoric man on our hands. What are we going to do with it? Do you think the Zoo would find a corner for him amongst the higher primates? Or shall we send him back along the time-dimension?

BAILEY: Send me back. Please.

TESTY: But he's a general. You said you wanted a general.

UG: Oh, yes, to be sure. I'll offer it to the Inner Circle, and (to HIG) I shall know to whom to give the credit.

BAILEY: Half a minute. There's some mistake. I'm no general. I'm a door-keeper of a cinema.

UG (with an effort of memory): Cinema, cinema? Oh, I know—exhibitions of moving pictures with mechanical voices.

BAILEY: Funny way of putting it. (Passing leaflet) Here's what we're going to show—er—this is what we showed next week, if you know what I mean.

[TESTY passes leaflet to UG.

UG: H'm. *College Beauties*. Female students. Do you observe the legs of these girls? Enormous muscles. Like Testy's. Look at that girl's tibialis anticus. Here they are, all in their knickers. (To BAILEY) What truth did this picture enunciate? What was its higher purpose?

BAILEY (scratching his head): You've got me there.

ONDA: What, exactly, is a theme song?

BAILEY: Well, miss, it's a bit difficult to explain. . . .

ONDA: Then sing one.

BAILEY: Not me, miss.

HIG (mesmerizing): Sing a theme song.

BAILEY (*with distaste*):

In yo' eyes—love-light lurks,  
Come clean, honey, shoot the works,  
Am I the guy?

HIG: Go on.

UG: No, no; that's enough. Evidently the mating song of the male. I must say his story seems improbable. Surely a man of his high military rank wouldn't be a door-keeper in a cinema.

HIG: It's obvious he's lying. He *is* a general, but he doesn't want to help us. (*Mesmerizing*) Were you, or were you not, a soldier?

BAILEY: I was once, but never again. (*Cries of "Ah!"*) But let me explain—

UG: Come, come, deception is useless. The situation is that we're having a lot of trouble with the barbarians—Eskimoos, Bashibazouks, gypsies and other races that can't or won't evolve. Bushmen will be bushmen, you know. They keep raiding us, and as we've grown unaccustomed to war, we want the advice of a military expert, like you.

BAILEY: If I do what I can, will you send me back afterwards?

UG: Certainly. Now what I expect the Inner Circle would like from you is a detailed plan of campaign.

HIG: A plan that won't involve much loss of life on our side. Personally, I feel that with my brain I owe it to humanity not to get killed.

BAILEY: You mean you're a funk.

HIG: How could you understand? We civilized men have evolved beyond mere animal courage. *Moral* courage is another matter. I am equal to anything in the way of moral courage. And before you call me a funk, let me tell you that you only fought because you were afraid of being thought afraid.

BAILEY: We fought because we thought the Germans were in the wrong.

ONDA: Couldn't you have explained to the Germans that they were in the wrong?

BAILEY: Why don't you explain to your barbarians that they're in the wrong? I suppose they *are* in the wrong? Or have you done something to annoy them? (*They are silent and embarrassed.*) Come on; out with it.

TESTY (*speaking up suddenly*): It's the glands.

ONDA: Testy, be quiet. You should be seen, not heard.

UG: There's no harm in his knowing. About two hundred years ago a new gland was discovered in the human body which, when grafted, gives an ancient a further hundred years of vigorous life. The glands of the barbarians, these sub-men, are eminently suitable for grafting.

BAILEY: I see. You've been vivisecting savages, and they don't like it. Don't ask me to help you.

HIG: They feel no pain. It is not even always fatal.

UG: It's all rigidly controlled by the Inner Circle, so that there's no danger that this grafting will develop into an abuse.

BAILEY (*obstinately*): I don't hold with vivisecting savages. Aren't they human beings?

UG: In a sense, yes. But you must remember that these sub-men are less to us than monkeys to you.

ONDA: He's making excuses. He's afraid to be a general.

BAILEY: Nonsense! What have generals got to be afraid of? Generals don't go into battle like admirals. Generals stop behind in a *château*. What I say is, you're in the wrong and I won't help you.

UG (*rising*): I have some work to do. Think it over.

BAILEY: My mind's made up.

UG: Then what shall we do with him?

TESTY: Oh, may I have him? Give him to me.

ONDA: Nonsense, Testy. How could you feed him?

UG: And there's no room here to exercise him. (*Loud-speaker bell rings.*) Oh, that may be Professor Bondo to confirm my honour.

VOICE: Hullo, is Professor Ug there?

UG (*excited*): Yes, speaking. Is that you, Bondo?

VOICE: Yes. Disappointing news, I'm afraid. The Inner Circle have removed your name from the Honours List.

UG (*downcast*): Oh? Do you know why?

VOICE: To make room for Mog. He is to get an honour and the gland treatment for his work on committees.

UG: Curse all axe-grinding politicians.

VOICE: Oh, do be careful. It's dangerous to talk like that. Good-bye. (*Rings off.*)

UG: And good-bye to a further hundred years of life. I shall die with my work unfinished.

HIG: Why not take the matter into your own hands?

[UG and ONDA catch his meaning, and their eyes fix ominously on BAILEY.

UG: Why not, indeed! I'll do it! Are you willing to operate, Hig?

HIG: Yes. At once.

[*He selects instruments at table L., and drops them with a clatter, one by one, into a surgical dish.*

BAILEY: Here, what's your game? You're not going to have my glands, so you needn't think it.

ONDA: It's all right. You won't feel it at all.

UG: Try and rise to the occasion. If you die, as you probably will, you will be dying to give my brain a fresh lease to serve humanity in its groping after the ultimate truth. Could you wish for a nobler death?

BAILEY: Yes. Besides, I'm not keen on dying.

HIG: Why argue? (*Drops last knife in tray. To BAILEY*) Sit here till I come for you.

[UG's party go off, L.

BAILEY: Think of something, Testy. (*She fondles his hair.*) Now don't start messing about. Can't you send me back?

TESTY: I'll try, if you can get into that cupboard.

BAILEY: But I can't move since Hig put the 'fluence on me. (*He struggles, but can only move from the waist up. She tries to help him rise, fails, then kisses him.*) Here, that's taking a mean advantage.

TESTY: I'll get a drink that will stimulate your will.



BAILEY: If ever a man wanted a drink, I do. A hundred thousand years from home and at the mercy of a lot of creeping Crippens. My poor budgerigars! Why must it happen to me? With eight million people in London——

[TESTY *has dashed off, returned with a bottle, and drawn the cork behind him with a hearty sound like a champagne cork.*

BAILEY *leaps to his feet.*

That sounds good. Why, look, I've got the use of my legs.

TESTY: Quick, then; into the cupboard.

BAILEY: But what about that drink?

TESTY (*hustling him*): Oh, hurry! They'll be back.

BAILEY: It doesn't take long to have a quick one.

TESTY (*closing cupboard door on him*): Oh, do get in.

BAILEY (*inside*): Oh, all right. (*Putting head out*) Here, I've forgotten my cap.

TESTY: Never mind that. Get in. They're coming.

BAILEY (*inside*): Mr. Hyams won't half carry on about that hat. He'll stop it out of my wages. You don't know——

[TESTY *has pulled the lever of the machine, in reverse. The whirring noise brings UG's party hurrying on, L.*

HIG: What's all this? And where's that prehistoric man?

ONDA: I know. She's sending him back.

HIG (*rushing forward*): No, you don't.

[TESTY *bowls him over with a push.*

UG: Oh, dear, Testy's gone native. Mesmerize her, Hig.

HIG (*advancing*): Ha, Testy, I'll put you under a spell, and then we'll get that lover of yours back—for his glands.

[TESTY *fights the hypnotic influence, and with a last effort of will smashes the red valve with the bottle.*

TESTY: You can't get him back. (*Sinking to floor*) You don't know why . . . that red valve . . . worked . . .

[*Black out. Lights fade in to*

SCENE III: *The foyer again, a little later.*

*The foyer is as we left it. GEORGE is still looking at the photographs. MISS WITHERS is in her box. HELEN, however, is in BAILEY'S place, with leaflets for departing patrons.*

*As the lights come on, two patrons are approaching HELEN from stairs, and another couple, who have paused at photographs, follow slowly. From scraps of conversation—"I always like to let the crowd get out first." "And we have plenty of time for our last train." "The staff must be glad to be finished for the day"—these are clearly the last stragglers of a departed audience.*

MR. HYAMS, *flustered*, comes dashing down the stairs with a bunch of keys. He goes to MISS WITHERS' pigeon-hole.

HYAMS: I've found the duplicate keys. They were in my office after all. But they ought to have been with you.

MISS WITHERS: Yes. But you didn't bring them back last time.

HYAMS: Don't argue. I suppose Bailey hasn't turned up? I wonder where he is. I shall have to lock up for him. (*Coming to HELEN, who is giving leaflets to last patrons*) Look here, are they all out?

HELEN: I think those must be the last.

HYAMS: Go and make sure.

[HELEN *hurries off upstairs*.

Now, Miss Withers, have you struck a balance yet?

MISS WITHERS: No. I have a difference.

HYAMS: Short, or over?

MISS WITHERS: Short. Three-and-sevenpence.

HYAMS: Great Scott! We shall be ruined. Well, you'll have to find it later. Put the cash ready for the night safe. I'll get someone from the other exits to come with me in Bailey's place. I wonder where on earth Bailey's got to. I'm dying to tell him he's sacked. (*Calling up stairs*) Now then, Helen, let's hear from you. Are they all out?

[HELEN'S *voice*: No.

Well, hurry them up, can't you?

HELEN (*appearing at stairs*): A pair of love-birds.

[*A couple, very much in love and intertwined, come down stairs, take a leaflet from HELEN, and dawdle off R.*

HYAMS: What do they think this is—the abode of love? (*Becomes aware of GEORGE.*) Now, sir, if you please. We want to lock up.

GEORGE: Could I have a word with the manager?

*[Pulls out his handkerchief with a peculiar flourish.]*

HYAMS (*testily*): I am the manager. But I'm very busy.

GEORGE: I'm sorry to detain you now, and I won't keep you a moment, but the fact is there is a little matter upon which you might enlighten me.

*[During the speech, BERT runs on quietly from R. and neatly sandbags HYAMS from behind. HYAMS slumps to floor, falling well upstage. GEORGE seizes HELEN by the wrist.]*

One sound from you and I'll wring your neck.

*[BERT dashes into pay-box, dropping sandbag to R., drags MISS WITHERS out and hands her to GEORGE.]*

BERT: Here you are, George, take this cow. Lock 'em both up in the manager's office, and then come back for the manager's rings. I'll be getting the cash.

*[BERT dashes back into pay-box, while GEORGE hustles the two girls to L. At stairs MISS WITHERS suddenly screams.]*

MISS WITHERS: Don't, don't. You're hurting my arm.

GEORGE: Get a move on then.

*[They go off up stairs.]*

*The foyer should now be empty; but on looking to the R. we see that BAILEY, without his hat, is standing in his customary attitude by the shrub. No doubt he has just returned along the time-dimension. He does not seem to be fully conscious. Suddenly, off R., comes the faint cry: "Time, gentlemen, please!" This causes BAILEY to stir and flex his knees slightly. Again the cry, a little louder and more urgent: "Time, gentlemen, please!" BAILEY gives a jerk, wipes some imaginary foam off his moustache, and then begins to take stock of his surroundings with an amazed air. He sees the sandbag. This he picks up, and in doing so, observes round the pay-box the prostrate form of MR. HYAMS. He becomes fully awake with roused suspicions. Stealthily coming to R. angle of pay-box, he gets a slanting glance inside, observing BERT without being himself observed. Withdrawing round R. angle of pay-box, he takes a pipe (or a coin) from his pocket and*

throws it to *L.* of stage, where it falls with a slight clatter. BERT cautiously puts his head through the pigeon-hole, looking *L.* for the cause of the noise. BAILEY, in ambush, promptly sandbags him and he slumps back into box out of sight.

BAILEY goes to attend to HYAMS. Whilst thus engaged, GEORGE (unobserved by BAILEY) appears on top stair. GEORGE is perturbed on seeing BAILEY but quickly recovering his nerve, advances boldly.

GEORGE: Bailey, we've been looking for you everywhere. Where the devil have you been? (BAILEY stares and stutters.) Don't waste time in explaining. The manager has been taken ill. You were wanted to get some brandy. You'd better go now and look slippy.

BAILEY: Funny . . . I can't quite call you to mind, sir. . . .

GEORGE: What's the matter with you to-night, Bailey? I'm the accountant to the syndicate. The audit, you fool. Now go and get that brandy. I suppose you know you're going to be sacked? And I don't wonder at it.

BAILEY: I'll get the brandy from the pub opposite. Oh, look, Mr. Hyams opened his eyes just then!

[GEORGE bends, tenderly takes a ringed hand of MR. HYAMS, and begins chafing it, with covetous eyes on the rings.]

GEORGE: I'll see to him, Bailey. You get the brandy.

[BAILEY sandbags GEORGE neatly.]

BAILEY: That was a beauty. I hope I've done right. I don't remember any accountants, but to-night I don't really know where I am. He *might* be an accountant and the other bloke his clerk. Still, I've acted for the best—and I've got the sack anyway. What do I do now? I wish Mr. Hyams would come to his senses.

[He bends over HYAMS. During his soliloquy the door on *R.* side of pay-box opens and BERT crawls out, rises shakily, and pulls himself together. He peeps round pay-box, takes stock of position, and advances noiselessly behind BAILEY with a small automatic in his hand.]

BERT: Stick 'em up. (BAILEY turns with hands up.) You can drop that sandbag. (Sandbag drops within reach of HYAMS.) Did you lay my pal out?



BAILEY: Yes.

BERT: You swine. I'd like to do you in; but I'm going to use you. You're going to help us get out of this.

BAILEY: All right, mister. I don't want any trouble. After all, what's robbing a cinema? They can afford it.

BERT: Shut up. This is what you've got to do. You'll just lug my pal to the car that's waiting near the door. And no monkey tricks, not unless you want to die.

BAILEY: I'm not keen on dying, especially for a cinema that's going to sack me.

BERT: Don't talk so much. If there's any question, you'll say my pal has been taken ill. Do you understand?

BAILEY: Right. What about asking that bloke to help me?

*[He nods towards an imaginary person over BERT's shoulder. BERT half-turns instinctively. BAILEY springs at him, jerking up pistol-arm by the wrist. The force of his attack carries to R., where they struggle desperately.]*

*HYAMS sits up dazedly. He has lost his glasses and cannot see very well. His hand touches sandbag and grasps it.*

*BERT now begins to overpower BAILEY, forcing him back, step by step, to C. Here he gets BAILEY on the floor, but he cannot free his pistol-hand.*

*HYAMS gets on his knees, and after peering at the prostrate GEORGE, hits him feebly with the sandbag.*

BAILEY: Don't waste time on him, sir. Hit this one.

HYAMS: Coming.

*[By the time HYAMS has struggled to his feet, BAILEY is on top.]*

*HYAMS sandbags BAILEY without much force.*

BAILEY: O-oh! Not me, sir. I'm on *your* side, sir.

HYAMS: How can I see without my glasses! Say when.

BAILEY (*now underneath*): Now. Let drive, sir.

HYAMS (*peering*): Are you quite sure?

BAILEY: Yes, sir. Give him a tuppenny one, sir.

*[HYAMS, now more himself, sandbags BERT with full effect.]*

*BAILEY struggles to a sitting position, holding his head.*

'Phew. That was a near thing, sir.



MIRIAM (*peering in L.*): Is it safe now?

HYAMS: Yes. I think we've won.

[HELEN and MISS WITHERS follow MIRIAM.]

MISS WITHERS: Then I'll go and make up the cash. (*Steps over bodies to pay-box.*)

HYAMS: Helen, see if you can find a bottle of something in my office.

[HELEN goes off L.]

MIRIAM: When I'd finished in the auditorium, Mr. Hyams, I found them locked in your room and I let them out.

BAILEY: Good old Testy. You let me out too.

MIRIAM: What do you mean? You were here fighting.

HYAMS: And that reminds me, Bailey. Where were you before that?

BAILEY: I had . . . a trip through space . . . along the fourth dimension . . . that's right, Testy, isn't it?

MIRIAM: Why do you keep calling me "Testy"?

HYAMS: What are you talking about, anyway?

BAILEY: Well, it's like this, sir. You know events have—er—a four-dimensional order?

HYAMS: I don't know anything of the kind.

BAILEY: Well, sir, the fourth dimension is something like this—

HYAMS: Oh, I only want to know where you got to.

BAILEY: Along the fourth dimension, sir. Time doesn't flow onwards, sir, it—it . . . You tell him, Testy.

HYAMS: Just as I thought: he's been drinking.

MIRIAM: No. He's not well.

[She kneels, takes BAILEY's head on her bosom and smooths his brow.]

BAILEY: I left my cap there. That'll prove it. That'll prove it in a hundred thousand years' time.

[Laughs weakly.]

HELEN (*who has returned with bottle and glasses*): He's batty, if you ask me.

MIRIAM: He's ill. Mr. Hyams hit him on the head. I saw him do it.

HYAMS: Quite unintentional. My blow went to the wrong address. Shall I give him a drop of this? . . .

BAILEY: I couldn't half do with a spot of brandy.

HYAMS: Sorry. I've only got whisky.

BAILEY: Then I couldn't half do with a spot of whisky.

MIRIAM: I shouldn't give him any, Mr. Hyams—not as he's had a knock on the head.

BAILEY: Oh, Testy! Doing me out of a tonic again. Just like you did in a hundred thousand years' time.

HYAMS: Look here, Bailey, you'd better go home—

BAILEY: Yes. My poor budgerigars.

HYAMS: —and get some sleep. In view of your bravery I won't enquire too deeply where you slipped off to to-night. If you can't find your cap it will be stopped out of your wages. And, remember this, don't let it happen again.

CURTAIN

Marjorie R. Watson

THE AZTEC IDOL

*A Play*

## CHARACTERS

REGGIE TANNER

SCOTTY

TERESA ROBINSON

DON MANUEL

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SCENE : *The living-room of TERESA ROBINSON's home in a small Mexican village.*

*The curtain rises on a white-washed room. The street door and the window are in the back wall and in one of the side walls is the door leading into the next room. Though the furniture is of rough wood, a shawl thrown over the back of a chair, a coloured tablecloth and one or two earthenware jars of vivid flowers fill the room with brightness. On the top of a low cupboard is an Aztec idol studded with jade and turquoise and with a wide gold chain of antique design lying in a heap in front of it. The table bears signs of a recent meal, for remnants of maize cakes, beans and some sort of stewed meat are lying on earthenware dishes with wooden or bone spoons and forks by their side.*

REGGIE TANNER, *an untidy and not too recently shaved young man, is lying on the settle reading a book. The latch of the door is rattled and though REGGIE raises his eyes from his book and listens, he does not move. There is silence again and he goes on reading.*

*At the open window appears the head and shoulders of SCOTTY. On his head is a frayed and battered sombrero and his open-necked shirt is grey with dirt. His face is so dark with sunburn and grime that he looks like a native and his Scottish accent is incongruous in anyone with such an appearance in such surroundings.*

SCOTTY : Teresa not back yet ?

[REGGIE looks up with a start, but seeing who it is, scowls and resumes his reading. SCOTTY leans his arms on the window-sill and settles himself down for a long talk.

SCOTTY : I thought I couldna ha' missed her, though I did glance off for a minute or two. Ye canna miss Teresa, wi' her bonny smile and her "Guid mornin', Scotty," or "Guid nicht, Scotty," as she goes by. Ye havena left ower much o' the victuals she set out for ye. Last time I keeked in at the window, I saw them a' laid out neat and sweet, so that ye shouldna have to stir yourself, but just eat them up. And now it's all ready for her to clear away and wash up

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and put the next meal ready. Maybe she'll be tired when she comes home. It wouldna ha' done ye a power o' harm to move off that settle and wash the pots up for her.

REGGIE (*sitting up*): Mind your own blasted business ! Of all the damned impertinence ! You haven't done an honest day's work for years, you old mollusc. I'd like to know when you last washed up for your Niña.

SCOTTY: That's different. I have married Niña. (*Pause.*) Niña's an Indian and Indian women are brought up to work ; they expect it.

REGGIE: Teresa's mother was an Indian.

SCOTTY: An Aztec.

REGGIE: There aren't any Aztecs left, and, anyway, it's the same thing as being an Indian.

SCOTTY: Doctor Robinson thought her guid enough to marry, and no' just a native ceremony, but a guid Christian wedding. She had her marriage lines, because I have seen them pasted in the back of Teresa's Bible, and if you were a decent Godfearing man you would——

REGGIE: Make an honest woman of Teresa ? That's no business of yours, and anyway what does Teresa say when you tell her what you think of me ?

SCOTTY: I'm no' so big a fool as to tell her. I ken it is na use talking to a woman in love ; the more ye try to thwart her, the worse she'll become.

REGGIE: Well, if that damned dago will only listen to reason, you will get rid of me for good.

SCOTTY: Aye, aye, oh, aye ! Teresa told me she was staying behind to see Don Manuel, going to ask him to lend you the money to get home. He must need a power o' persuading to keep her all this time. Don Manuel is partial to a bonny face, though I dinna think he would be such a fool as to interfere with Teresa, unless she wanted him to, because she's a cousin of Mato, the Yaqui bandit. Ye didna ken that, did ye, Reggie ? Mind you make yourself scarce if he ever comes calling here, for he dinna like white men and he dinna like explorers, and ye're both, man, and Mato's a Yaqui Indian and no' a merciful man.

REGGIE: Go away, blast you ! I'm not interested in your tuppenny-ha'penny bandits. Can't you see I'm trying to read ?

SCOTTY: So ye're no' afraid. Perhaps you would like to know why the rest of the wee bit of an expedition hasna come back and will never come back ?

REGGIE (*sitting up*): Have you heard anything definite ?

SCOTTY: Na doubt ye're sorry ye locked the door on me now. It's no' the sort of thing Teresa would do. I dinna ken the day when that lassie wasna pleased to see me. It was the same when her dad was alive. There was ay an open door and a welcoming chair for Scotty in the little *casa blanca*.

REGGIE: I don't suppose you know anything. If there had been any fresh news, Teresa would have heard it.

SCOTTY: I dinna ken a time, day nor night, when Tam Robinson barred his door against any man, and never a thing did he lose in all the years he lived here.

REGGIE (*going back to his book*): I don't suppose he had anything to lose.

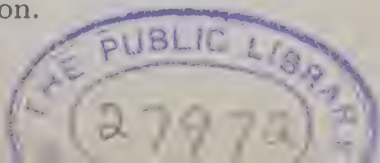
SCOTTY: He had when he first came here, but he had to sell them before the end to feed himself and Teresa. Yon's the reason he wrote to that Yankee museum about his discoveries. He didna want to part with them, but he was getting too old to do all the excavating himself, and there was Teresa's future to consider.

REGGIE: The museum people said his letter sounded grasping—or shall we say Scottish ? That's why they sent Palmer and his party to investigate. They wanted to be sure, before they agreed to Doctor Robinson's terms.

SCOTTY: And now your lousy expedition is na good.

REGGIE: You can't blame me for Robinson's death. Good Lord ! the fever nearly killed me, too. It was he who gave it to me. The other poor devils who went on have probably died of it all alone out there in the jungle. That's why they have never come back.

SCOTTY: Na, na. Ye were the only one lucky enough to catch the fever from poor old Robinson.



REGGIE : Lucky ! I might have died as he did.

SCOTTY : At least ye would have died between clean sheets and been given a decent Christian burial. As it was, it kept you from going on with the others.

REGGIE : What are you hinting ? Has there really been any news of the expedition ? Oh, if only I could speak the damned lingo I'd find out the truth for myself, instead of having to rely on a blasted old pirate like you.

SCOTTY : Now, Reggie, dinna go loosening your temper. I was in the British Navy once, so be careful what it is you're saying.

REGGIE : Then why aren't you in England drawing a pension, instead of living up here in a village in Sonora half hidden in the jungle ?

SCOTTY : Because I like it fine here, and a Mexican-Indian wife wouldna be exactly at home in a Scottish village.

REGGIE : I say, what's your real name, Scotty ?

SCOTTY : That's no business of yours. Scotty was guid enough for Doc Robinson and Teresa, so I reckon it will have to be guid enough for you.

REGGIE : We had a dog called Scotty when I was a boy.

SCOTTY : There's many a dog better than some men I know.

REGGIE : Not the dogs round here.

SCOTTY : The folks round here are fond of their animals.

REGGIE : Fond ! You've said it. So fond they don't mind a pig or two in the living-room, to say nothing of a few hens.

SCOTTY : You've never seen a speck of dirt in here, let alone pigs.

REGGIE : No, not in here. Robinson doesn't seem to have gone completely native, in spite of his wife, and he has instilled a few English ideas into Teresa.

SCOTTY : Robinson was a fine man.

REGGIE : But a poor doctor apparently.

SCOTTY : He was a ship's doctor until his health gave out. This place suited him.

REGGIE: I suppose you were on his ship, Scotty? You must have been fond of him to follow him to a place like this? It's no home for a man like you.

SCOTTY: Very affable all of a sudden, Reggie. No doubt you're wanting something.

REGGIE: Look here, Scotty, if you do know anything about the expedition you might tell me. It may alter all my plans.

SCOTTY: Verra well, but keep a civil tongue in your head. One of Mato's bandits is in the village on a visit to a relation. If you ask me, a guid many of the villagers here have relations among the bandits, like our Teresa, God bless her, —daughter of a good Christian Englishman, but she has a bandit for a cousin.

REGGIE: Had that Indian fellow seen anything of the expedition?

SCOTTY: Patience, man, patience, I'm coming to it. The bandits have a wee stronghold a few miles higher up, and a place verra difficult to find unless you know the district. It seems your friends lost themselves a wee bit trying to get out of the jungle and stumbled right into Mato's stronghold. Leastways, four *gringos*, whose luggage was full of Aztec gold and things like yon graven image, turned up in the camp, and just to show them what he thinks of white men and explorers, Mato strung them up to the nearest tree.

REGGIE: He . . . Good God! You mean he hanged them all?

SCOTTY: He must have been in a hurry, because he dinna usually kill folk he dinna like so nice and quick.

REGGIE: Then they're all dead!

SCOTTY: Dinna say you're surprised. For days you've been insisting they were dead and you couldna stay waiting for them any longer.

REGGIE: Dead, yes. I knew they must be dead after all this time, but with fever or killed by wild beasts or . . . well, anything but this.

SCOTTY: I noticed ye werena in any hurry to go and find them.



REGGIE: What could I do single-handed, traipsing about the jungle with a native guide whose lingo I couldn't understand?

SCOTTY: It has been done before. I'm thinking there will be a few questions asked when ye go home to headquarters. Aye, and now I ken why ye daurna write for funds to get back.

REGGIE: Are you suggesting I was afraid to go after the others?

SCOTTY: I am merely wondering why you are still safely here while your friends have been missing for all these weeks.

REGGIE: Good Lord, man! You know I've been ill. You can't shake off that fever in a day or two.

SCOTTY: In a day or two?

REGGIE: You're sure they are all dead?

SCOTTY: Aye, all four of them. No' a man left to tell tales on you, so you can say what you like when you get back.

REGGIE: All four? But there were six altogether.

SCOTTY: The guide was an Indian, a Yaqui, one of themselves, so they wouldna touch him; and as for the dago, Luis, well, if he hadna Indian blood in him, he had married into the Yaqui tribe.

REGGIE: I don't see why they should want to kill white men.

SCOTTY: Ye have the Spanish colonists to thank for that; and besides, your friends were stealing the gods of the Aztecs and their treasure.

REGGIE: What rot! No one's worshipped them for centuries. I've seen native children using stone images for dolls.

SCOTTY: Aye, the ordinary stone things that are only of interest to your antiquarian explorers; but the stuff found up here is verra different. The jade and turquoise in that thing would be worth something, I dinna doubt, to say nothing of that gold chain or collar or whatever it is. The Yaqui think they have a right to any gold that is found here and that white explorers are thieves. Maybe they are right.



REGGIE: Until I came here, I always thought Mexico was civilized, and that even the natives——

SCOTTY: Mato and his bandits dinna run around half naked or carry tomahawks or go shouting “ Wa-wa-wa-wa-wa-wa-wa.” They have shirts and trousers and sombreros and nice long-range rifles, so it isna any use running away, though if I were in your shoes I would rather run and be shot than risk being taken by them. Have ye ever seen a man that’s been eaten by red ants ?

REGGIE: But if they really are such devils, how is it they haven’t made mincemeat of Don Manuel and his lousy little village years ago ?

SCOTTY: Stick a knife into Don Manuel and the blood that would flow would be two-thirds Red Indian and about one-third blue Spanish.

REGGIE: I suppose that’s why you and Doctor Robinson went to the length of marrying your Indian women.

SCOTTY: We also took the precaution of being made blood brothers of the Yaqui tribe.

REGGIE: It’s like selling your birthright for a mess of pottage.

SCOTTY: Mind you don’t sell yours for less than porridge one of these fine days. Mato and his bandits would just love to get you. Murdering your friends will have whetted their appetites.

REGGIE: I suppose you would like to see them get me ! You could have Teresa all to yourself then.

SCOTTY: Man, if it wasna for you, Teresa wouldna be degrading herself as she is. It’s enough to make poor Tam Robinson turn in his grave.

REGGIE: It’s not my fault he left her without a penny. He ought to have made proper provision for her years ago. He knew he might die at any time in this damned rotten country.

SCOTTY: I wouldna say so much about it if ye worked and kept her, but to let the lassie go out washing clothes for the dagoes round here is more than a man can bear.

REGGIE: You don't suppose I want her to work? But if I weren't here, she would have to keep herself just the same.

SCOTTY: If you hadna been here, I could have talked her into coming and living with my Niña and me.

REGGIE: How was I to know what would happen? Only a fool would carry large sums of money about on an expedition like this; besides, I hadn't got it to bring. Every penny I had with me went while I was ill.

SCOTTY: Aye, ye didna stint yoursel' while ye had it.

REGGIE: How was I to know Palmer and the others would get themselves killed? I thought there would be more money when they came back; they couldn't spend it in the jungle. I'm positive some native stole most of what I had while I was ill. At the moment I haven't a penny.

SCOTTY: Ye could work, man.

REGGIE: What could I do in a place like this? I'm a journalist. I could soon earn plenty of money if I could get back to civilization.

SCOTTY: Civilization!

REGGIE: Well, you can't call this place civilized. You can't even get out of it without a guide. If only Don Manuel would lend me the money, I could get a horse and a guide to Hermosillo, and then the train from there to Guaymas. I'd be all right there.

*[He glances at the idol.]*

SCOTTY: I dinna doubt that would fetch a good price, but unfortunately ye didna go into the jungle and ye dinna dig it up, and poor Doc. Robinson did. All the things he brought hame are Teresa's, because this house and all that is in it are hers. It's all he had to leave, but he left it legal and proper.

REGGIE: Are you implying I want to rob Teresa?

SCOTTY: Shut up! Shut up! Here is Teresa.

*[He disappears and is heard greeting her. The latch rattles and REGGIE, suddenly remembering, goes and unbars the door, but fastens it again after TERESA. She is wearing the dress of a*

*Mexican peasant, but though her hair is thick and black, her skin is no darker than that of a Spaniard. She is carrying a basket of washing which she puts down hurriedly.*

TERESA : Reggie darling !

*[He takes her in his arms and kisses her.]*

TERESA : For one little minute, I thought you weren't going to kiss me.

REGGIE : Would it have been such a terrible disaster if I had forgotten ?

TERESA : Yes, oh yes ! All the way home I have been thinking how I would rush in and throw myself in your arms.

REGGIE : And then the door got in the way.

TERESA : Reggie, why did you fasten the door ?

REGGIE : To keep Scotty out. What did Don Manuel say ?

TERESA : Don't let's talk about that yet.

REGGIE : Then it's bad news ?

TERESA : Bad for you, but good for me. Why did you want to keep Scotty out ?

REGGIE : He gets on my nerves. He's everlastingly in here. He's worse than the ten plagues of Egypt all rolled into one.

TERESA : He doesn't mean any harm. Father was very fond of him and liked him to come.

REGGIE : And now even barring the door won't keep him out. If it hadn't been so infernally hot, I'd have fastened the window, too.

TERESA : Poor Scotty. I wish you liked him just a little.

REGGIE : He's like one of those beastly psycho-analyst fellows. He has a way of spotting all my faults and pointing them out, even those I didn't know about until he nosed them out. And, anyway, he's a lazy, good-for-nothing skunk himself. He never works and he lives on a native wife. Yes, and I'm a dirty skunk, too, living with you and sponging on you. I ought to be kicked out into the jungle.

TERESA : Please, Reggie, don't talk like that. Oh . . . oh, Reggie ! Do you think of me as a native woman, as someone like Scotty's Niña ?

REGGIE: A native ! Good Lord, no ! Go and look at yourself in the mirror, Miss Robinson.

TERESA: I am half Indian, and I overheard some of the other women who were washing at the stream say I didn't look like an Englishman's daughter. What's wrong with me, Reggie ?

REGGIE: You're Teresa, Teresa Robinson and my little Tessa, and there's no one quite like you in the whole world.

TERESA: Reggie, Reggie darling ! Nothing in the world matters if you love me.

REGGIE: You're trembling. What's the matter ?

TERESA: I ran nearly all the way home, I wanted you so badly. Reggie, don't go, don't ever go and leave me.

REGGIE: But Teresa, what's the matter ? Didn't you see Don Manuel ?

TERESA: It was no use. I must clear the table.

*[She starts to clear the table.]*

REGGIE: Never mind that now. Do come here, Teresa. Did you speak to Don Manuel yourself ?

TERESA: I spoke to him myself . . . all by myself. I asked him to let you go with one of his packs as far as Hermosillo to the railway, and I said if he would only lend you the fare from there to Guaymas you would pay him back as soon as you arrived, and . . . and . . . he said . . . Reggie, I was glad, so glad when I knew you couldn't go. Please don't be angry with me. I was glad I failed, and that's why I ran all the way home. I was afraid something would happen and you would be gone when I got back.

REGGIE: Silly baby ! How could I go if Manuel won't help me ?

TERESA: No, of course, you couldn't. It was silly of me, wasn't it ?

REGGIE: Very, very silly indeed. Don't you want to leave this wretched little village even to go with me ?

TERESA: It would be different if we could go together, perhaps, but I am afraid for you to go alone.



REGGIE: Darling, don't you trust me?

TERESA: Yes, of course, Reggie, I trust you, but I'm thinking of all the long while I shall have to wait here by myself until you send for me. Why can't you stay and let us go on living here always?

REGGIE: Tess, darling, you must understand how I feel. You've never been away from here, or you would. I must go back to the world in which I was brought up. If I had any money, it would be another matter. I can't go on living here in your house, on your earnings, taking everything from you, when it's I who should be working and making a home for you. If I had only the money for our passage, I would be off to England to-morrow and take you with me.

TERESA: I'm happy enough here, as long as you are with me.

REGGIE: If ever I get out of here, I'll work and slave until I have enough money to send for you. Darling, don't you see?

TERESA: Are you sure we will be happy in a big town—just as happy as we are here?

REGGIE: Of course. It's wicked to keep you hidden away in a little corner of the world like this. I always used to think Wordsworth a sentimental old ass, but he might have known you when he wrote:

“ A violet in a mossy dell,  
Half hidden from the view,  
A maid whom there was none to see  
And very few to love,”

or something like that.

TERESA: Father used to say I'd hate to live in a town. He called this the Garden of Paradise.

REGGIE: That's because he didn't want you to leave him.

TERESA: Scotty makes London and New York sound horrible places.

REGGIE: It's no use listening to Scotty. I believe he has very good reasons for wanting to keep away from big



towns. I hate to think of you wearing out your hands washing clothes for the greasy dagoes round here.

TERESA: But, Reggie, we must have money for our food, and I don't think you'd be very good at washing shirts.

REGGIE: Are you positive your father left nothing? My God, not even a penny?

TERESA: Only the house. There are a few coins I found in his coat pocket, and I've added one or two from my earnings. I thought that if one day I married . . .

*[She takes a coloured handkerchief out of the cupboard and unties it, revealing a few coins.]*

REGGIE: That wouldn't buy a very big trousseau, my pet.

TERESA: Would it help us now?

REGGIE: No, darling. It wouldn't help one of us, let alone two. It wouldn't even hire a guide to get us out of this damn village to the railway.

*[She takes up the Bible which is lying on the top of the cupboard, and looks at something pasted in the back of it.]*

TERESA: Reggie, when you do send for me, you will marry me?

REGGIE: I'd marry you to-morrow if it were possible.

TERESA: It will soon be time for Father Pedro to come to the village again. He comes every three months to say Mass.

REGGIE: He's R.C. and I'm not. You must understand, Tessa; we'll have to wait until we reach a town where there's a Registry Office.

TERESA: Does a Registry Office make it all right if you are different religions?

REGGIE: Quite all right. So we'll have to wait.

TERESA: How much will it cost to go by train to Guaymas?

REGGIE: More money than we have, and we have to find the way out of this place before we can take the train. The railway's miles away.

*[There is a tap on the door.]*

REGGIE: Damn! I'll bet that's Scotty again.

TERESA: I must speak to him, Reggie. We can't be unkind.

*[The tap is repeated and she leans out of the window, but quickly withdraws.]*

TERESA: It isn't Scotty.

REGGIE: Who is it?

TERESA *(after a slight pause)*: Don Manuel.

*[They exchange glances, then REGGIE runs his hands over his hair to try to tidy it, and hurries to open the door. DON MANUEL is standing outside. His clothes are immaculate, if a little gaudy, and though his face shows traces of Indian blood, he has the manner of a Spanish nobleman. He speaks English with a slight foreign accent.]*

MANUEL: You are *Señor* Tanner, I believe.

REGGIE: Yes. Won't you come in?

MANUEL: Thank you, *señor*.

*[He comes in and REGGIE shuts the door. TERESA has not moved from the window, and shrinks back as he enters.]*

REGGIE: Do sit down, won't you?

MANUEL: Thank you, *señor*.

*[He looks at TERESA and bows. She goes to the far side of the room and sits down, keeping her eyes lowered. He then sits.]*

MANUEL: This afternoon the *señorita* came to ask for my aid, which I was at that time unable to give. Since then I have thought well on the matter and find that, under certain circumstances, I might be able to change my answer.

*[TERESA looks up with an expression of dismay on her face, but REGGIE is too intent on what MANUEL is saying to notice her.]*

MANUEL: I have only recently returned from Hermosillo, so that you will, I hope, forgive me if I am not as well acquainted with your affairs as I should be.

REGGIE: I am afraid you won't have had a very good account of me. You see, I can't speak a word of Spanish, let

alone any of the Indian dialects, so that there's been quite a good deal of misunderstanding, and I've probably given the villagers a very bad impression.

MANUEL: Yes, *señor*, I am afraid that is true. You will forgive me if I ask a question or two? Please do not think it is my idle curiosity, but a mere formality through which we must go before I can even consider granting your request. You understand I have only the villagers' very incoherent account of your coming.

REGGIE: Please ask any questions you like. It's only right you should. I'd be surprised if you didn't. Do forgive my ignorance of your customs. Teresa, shouldn't we offer Don Manuel some *maté* or something or other to drink?

MANUEL: Let the shortness of time be an excuse for the disregard of ceremony, *señor*.

REGGIE: Thanks awfully. Well, I don't know how much you have heard already, but I'm a journalist. At the moment I'm freelancing, and I joined John Palmer's expedition hoping to write accounts for various English and American periodicals, and perhaps find material for a book. Travel books are very popular at the moment, you know.

MANUEL: I trust you have found the desired story. I understand the expedition has failed.

REGGIE: Oh, that won't make any difference. As long as there's a good story, the papers won't mind whether it's about success or failure. In fact, it's rather fashionable to fail at the moment.

MANUEL: And the English know so little of this part of the world that any exciting adventures with which you may embroider your accounts will be readily believed.

REGGIE (*with a nervous laugh*): Well . . . well, I can promise you this, Don Manuel. I shall only need a week or two in . . . in some town where there is a regular telegraph and postal service to have more than enough money to repay any I shall have to borrow.

MANUEL: And the money for this expedition?

REGGIE: That was found by the museum to which Doctor Robinson wrote. John Palmer was in charge, and all the

money for our expenses was in his possession, and consequently I didn't think it would be necessary to bring very much.

MANUEL: And now John Palmer and the expedition and the money are all lost in the jungle.

REGGIE: I don't know how true it is, but Scotty says they have all been murdered by bandits.

MANUEL: It is true, I am afraid. It is unfortunate. It will make the English and Americans think we are still barbarians here. It was this news that made me decide to see if it were possible to help you.

REGGIE: But surely your Government doesn't let such people go on murdering and plundering?

MANUEL: Mato is a new and, as yet, not very famous bandit and he has a safe hiding-place in the jungle. Besides, we are very much out of the way here, and it may be the Government will side with Mato. After all, your explorers had taken treasure which in the eyes of the natives belongs to them.

REGGIE: Well, I won't argue over that, but I can assure you I am only concerned in this as a journalist, reporting the adventures of the party, and not sharing in the profits. I was to receive my expenses only.

MANUEL: What exactly do you want me to do?

REGGIE: I have some English friends in Guaymas, but I know they intend leaving by the end of this month. They will give me any further assistance I may need, but I must get to Guaymas without delay or I shall miss them.

MANUEL: Which means you will want a horse and a guide to Hermosillo, and then the railway fare to Guaymas.

REGGIE: I'll give you my I O U, of course. I can promise you won't have to wait long.

MANUEL: One moment, *señor*. Just at the moment I am somewhat pressed for ready money myself, but if you would be content with your own fare only, I could perhaps help you.

REGGIE: Why, yes, of course. It would be only my fare.

MANUEL (*with a glance at TERESA*): I see. Just you alone.

REGGIE: Yes.

MANUEL: Ah, then I think that can be managed.

REGGIE: I'm not quite sure of the exact fare, but I think——

MANUEL: I have made that journey myself so many times that I know the fare only too well. Could you leave to-night?

REGGIE: To-night?

MANUEL: In half an hour, shall we say?

REGGIE: Yes . . . yes, I think so. There's nothing to delay me.

MANUEL: I have a pack-train leaving for Hermosillo to-night, six mules under the care of Pancho Lopez, and it may be many weeks before I send another. Pancho can speak a few words of English. He is anxious to start to-night, so that he can reach his brother's home in La Colorado by midnight and sleep there. That's forty miles from the railway, so that if you do not want to miss your friends, it will have to be to-night.

REGGIE: I've very little packing. I could be ready in ten or fifteen minutes.

TERESA: Reggie!

REGGIE: My darling, it won't be for long.

MANUEL: Then you intend returning, *señor*?

REGGIE: No, but I shall send for Teresa as soon as I have enough money to keep her.

MANUEL: You have, I suppose, a passport, and some papers connecting you officially with the expedition?

REGGIE: Yes, I'll fetch them.

[*He goes into the next room. SCOTTY's head appears above the window-sill, unseen by those in the room.*]

TERESA: Why have you come here? I haven't changed my mind.



MANUEL: Teresa, this afternoon you asked me for two fares to Guaymas, and swore the Englishman would rather have none than just the one, but now it seems he only requires one.

TERESA: Because I told him you would not give us two. We have now arranged that I shall wait until he has the money to send for me. You heard him say so. If he knew what you said to me this afternoon, he would not go.

MANUEL: He doesn't seem very distressed at leaving you.

TERESA: Because it's only for a little while.

MANUEL: Yet *you* are distressed.

TERESA: He is English, and Englishmen don't like to show their feelings. My father told me so.

MANUEL: Your father was a very different man.

TERESA: You needn't think I shall change my mind when Reggie has gone. I know why you have become so generous suddenly.

[REGGIE returns with the papers, which he gives to MANUEL.

REGGIE: These are the papers.

MANUEL: Thank you, *señor*.

[SCOTTY disappears below the sill as MANUEL turns and takes the papers up to the window.

TERESA (*in a low voice*): Reggie, I must go with you.

REGGIE: My darling, that's impossible. You see how difficult it is to get money for me alone. If you insist, it will probably result in neither of us going. Come and help me pack; you know where things are better than I do.

MANUEL: Will you let me have ink and paper, *señor*, and I will write out the note for you to sign.

REGGIE: Certainly. Where's the ink, Teresa?

TERESA runs and fetches ink, pen and paper.

REGGIE: Don Manuel, I shall never forget your generosity and kindness. I shall always have very pleasant memories of Mexico, and make a point of recording them in my articles.

Here's the pen and ink, sir. The pen's a bit scratchy, I'm afraid, but it's all we have. If you will excuse me, I must get on with my packing. Come and talk to me, Tessa, while I pack.

*[MANUEL writes out the note and places it with the passport. In the meantime, SCOTTY appears at the window, looks round the room, and then, coming to the door, opens it cautiously and comes in.]*

SCOTTY: Wheest ! King David !

MANUEL: *i Quién est !* Oh, it is you, my good Scotty.

SCOTTY: Listen to me, King David. I ken what you're trying to do and where you're sending yon lad.

MANUEL: You don't understand, Scotty. I am doing merely what I am asked.

SCOTTY: Aye, aye, oh aye. I understand verra well indeed. I understand as well as you that it isna safe for any man who has anything to do with that expedition to go doon the trail to La Colorado. Mato and his bandits are camping there and will be these two weeks or more. Pancho and your pack will be safe enough, because he is a Yaqui and the load is stuff that will be of no use to Yaqui Indians, but it will be death for that English lad.

MANUEL: What's that to do with me ? He insists on going.

SCOTTY: Because he doesn't know that the Yaqui are there, and you haven't told him.

MANUEL: If he waits until the bandits have gone, he will miss his friends in Guaymas and be stranded again, unless he is an adept at finding young women like Teresa to keep him.

SCOTTY: You're sending him now because you want to be sure he will never come back for Teresa, but even if he dinna come back you willna have her. I have a notion what it was ye said to Teresa this afternoon, and I have kenned the lassie since the day she was born, and ye'll never win her that way.

MANUEL: I was a fool to try and bargain with her ; I should have waited until he had gone. Holy Mother, why should she slave for a poverty-stricken Englishman while with me

she would live like a lady ? It's madness. She does not know what is good for her.

SCOTTY : I'm a peaceful man and a law-abiding, Manuel, but there are things I will no' abide. It wasna for my health I came to live in a Sonora village away from newspapers and policemen, and there are more men than Mexicans that can use a knife. Lay one finger on Teresa and ye willna have time to regret it.

MANUEL : Then why have you never stuck a knife into the Englishman ?

SCOTTY : Because the lassie has set her heart on him, and if it will make her happy to love a fool like yon, then she shall have him as long as she likes, and no one is going to interfere.

MANUEL : What do you want me to do ? If I send the young man, he will be killed by bandits ; and if I keep him here, he will miss his friends, have no money, and go on living on Teresa's earnings.

SCOTTY : But if you let him go and send Teresa with him, the bandits won't touch either of them, because she's Mato's cousin and he's fond o' the lassie, bandit that he is, and he won't touch her or her man.

*[There is the sound of a tom-tom being beaten not far away.]*

SCOTTY : Listen to that. It's a Yaqui drum. I ken fine it's the Yaqui fellow who came here last night, and he's communicating with the band. I've a notion he's telling them about your pack starting to-night, and about the young gringo that's travelling with it.

*[They go outside and look along in the direction of the tom-tom.]*

MANUEL *(calling)* : ¿ Qué hey ? ¿ Qué hey ?

*[But the drubbing goes on. REGGIE comes in, followed by TERESA, who is carrying an old shirt and some socks.]*

TERESA : But it's so old, Reggie.

REGGIE : Oh, well, leave it out. Do you hear that tom-tom ? They are nothing more than a lot of lousy savages even here in the village. Good Lord, where's Don Manuel ? He must have gone.

TERESA: No, there he is talking to Scotty outside.

REGGIE: I suppose I'd better sign this damn I O U or I shan't see the money. Only the bare amount, stingy devil; not a ha'penny over to buy a drink.

TERESA (*running to the table and taking up the handkerchief of money*): Then you must have this, Reggie. I don't need it.

REGGIE: I can't, Tess. I can't take that.

TERESA: Yes, yes. You will need it on the journey. At least it will buy you a meal. . . . Reggie, you could sell the idol and the chain in Hermosillo, couldn't you?

REGGIE: Either there or in Guaymas. The chain will sell all right. Gold's gold all the world over.

TERESA: Would it fetch enough money for you to send for me?

REGGIE: It would certainly help.

TERESA: Then take them. Please, please take them.

REGGIE: All right, Tess, I'll take them. Here give me that shirt. I'll just go and slip them into my bag.

*[He wraps the idol in the shirt and the chain in a sock, and also gathers up the handkerchief of money on his way out. MANUEL and SCOTTY come in talking, and do not notice TERESA at first.]*

SCOTTY: Man, I've set my mind on making the lassie happy and I'll no' brook interference.

MANUEL: The man's a thief and a fool. The idol and the chain have gone.

TERESA: I gave them to him. He's going to sell them so that he can send me the money to follow him.

SCOTTY: Ye see, you're no' going to have your own way, Manuel. Ye'll have to let her go with her man, or she'll no' be happy.

TERESA: You said you loved me.

MANUEL: I still love you, Teresa.

TERESA: Then judge me by yourself, and you will know I can never change. Scotty, dear Scotty, you want me to be happy. Tell him to let me go.



SCOTTY: I dinna ken how I shall do without you, lassie, but if it will make you happy, you shall go. Run along and leave me to talk to Don Manuel for five minutes or so.

[TERESA goes into the next room.]

MANUEL: He's a fool to take that gold with him. Mato will show no mercy if he finds that.

SCOTTY: Aye, if he went alone it would be certain death, but he will be safe enough with Teresa. She could take all the gold in Mexico, and not a man would dare touch her.

MANUEL: I am not going to let her go. Why should I spend my money to make them happy and myself miserable?

SCOTTY: Because I know a thing or two you wouldna like the authorities to hear about.

MANUEL: What the devil do you mean?

SCOTTY: When the American Government hears about yon Yankees being killed, there will be the very devil to pay. It will mean the Mexican Government will have to take steps to round up the bandits.

MANUEL: Well, let them. Have the fools no sense? That idiot Mato might have known you can't kill an American or an Englishman without trouble. I'm getting tired of him and his bandits.

SCOTTY: I dare say, but you wouldna like the Government to know what connection you have with these Yaqui, and why your packs are allowed to pass unharmed. I ken well why that Yaqui Indian is in the village, and why he is beating that tom-tom now.

MANUEL: Have you been spying?

SCOTTY: Na, na, just doing a wee bit o' mental arithmetic; two and two, ye ken.

MANUEL: I had nothing to do with the death of those Americans.

SCOTTY: I can well believe that you are no' such a fool as to attract the Government's attention. He's been a fool, and that's why you're tired of Mato and his bandits. They have gone further than you think safe. All the same, if your



house were searched, there would be many a thing you wouldna like found.

MANUEL: What do you want me to do?

SCOTTY: Give the man money enough to take himself and Teresa to Guaymas.

MANUEL: I haven't enough on me.

SCOTTY: I've a notion ye have. Ye came here prepared to be rid of the Englishman at any cost.

MANUEL: As you wish.

*[He takes out the money and gives it to SCOTTY, who puts it inside the passport on the table.]*

SCOTTY: Teresa! Come here, lassie.

*[TERESA runs in.]*

SCOTTY: Don Manuel has changed his mind once more, and he is going to pay the fare for both of you.

TERESA: For me, too!

MANUEL: For you, too.

SCOTTY: By the way, Reggie Tanner has signed the I O U and it's only made out for half the sum. Do you want another?

MANUEL: No.

*[He takes the note and tears it up. TERESA catches his hand and kisses it.]*

MANUEL: Teresa, one day you may long for the peace and quiet of this little village in the trees. Come back, and I will be waiting for you. If you want the hot scent of the flowers, the cool streams and bright flamingoes, the little white houses and the friendly brown faces, come back and we will be married. I know you will. The old man of the forest saw it in the embers of his fire. One day you and I will be man and wife.

*[He goes out into the street. The tom-tom is now silent.]*

SCOTTY: Teresa, come here. Did he offer to marry you this afternoon?

TERESA: Yes. He's been wanting to marry me ever since father died, and this afternoon he said that, if I would promise to marry him, he would help Reggie, but not unless.

SCOTTY: If I had known, I would have thought twice before I helped ye to go off with that scatter-brained English fool. Manuel is a rich man and he would make ye a good husband. I didna think he meant to marry you, but just to treat you like the Indian girls. I was trying to put ye out of his way, because I thought he meant you harm.

TERESA: Scotty, dear Scotty, I'm so happy. I love Reggie. Don't you understand? I love Reggie. I must put my things together.

SCOTTY: Dinna fash yourself, lassie. Your things willna be any use in a town. Tessie, think a minute. Manuel's a rich man; he owns this village and he's honoured and respected here. He's like you, he has mixed blood in his veins, and he understands you and your ways.

TERESA: So does Reggie.

SCOTTY: Listen to me, lassie. Stand still.

*[He catches her by the arm and draws her downstage.]*

Has it never entered your head to think what the towns are like, or what the people will think of you? You talk so glibly about going to England, but would ye like that kind o' life? Ye've never been in a town.

TERESA: I've been to La Colorado.

SCOTTY: Aye, that's a guid town; it's forty miles from the railway.

*[REGGIE comes in, but stops in the doorway on seeing SCOTTY.]*

SCOTTY: I dinna think England the right place for you. You're a bonnie wee lassie in your own dress, but you couldna walk the streets o' London in it, and I'm fearing the English clothes would make you look less English than ever. They're no' so fond o' half-castes ower there.

TERESA: Please let me go, Scotty.

*[She pulls her arm free and REGGIE goes back into the other room.]*

TERESA: What do other people matter? Reggie loves me.

SCOTTY: Aye, maybe he does. I'm a meddling old fool and I only make matters worse, but I want ye to be happy, lassie. Maybe I have misjudged the lad because I dinna like him. If he makes you a good husband and you're happy, I'll be content. You had better go and break the news to him. Will ye take him the money?

TERESA: Yes. No, leave it there. He's just coming. I want to see what he says when he finds it is so much more than he expects. He has such queer ideas. I know he would rather be able to tell me he could take me than that I said I was coming.

SCOTTY: Weel, it makes no difference which way it is. Go and get your shawl. It's all ye'll need, for he will have to buy you proper clothes as soon as ye reach a town. Reggie my lad, 'tis time you were ready.

REGGIE (*off*): I'm coming. Tessa, what have you done with my camera?

TERESA: It's here, Reggie dear. I was just bringing it.

[REGGIE *comes in with his knapsack on his back.*

REGGIE: I've put my pipe down somewhere. Do have a look for it.

TERESA: Yes, dear, I'll find it.

[*She runs off.*

REGGIE: Has Don Manuel gone?

SCOTTY: Aye, he's gone. Did you want him?

REGGIE: No, it's all right. I can see the money stuck in the passport. By the way, did he take the IOU, do you know? I left it on the table.

SCOTTY: Aye, I think he took it.

REGGIE: A bit stingy with his money, but being a Scotsman, you'll probably sympathize with him.

SCOTTY: I do indeed. Ah, well, I'll go and see if Pancho has his mules ready. You'd best be hurrying.

[*He goes out quietly, and REGGIE does not notice, as he has now opened the passport and begun to count the money. He pauses a moment and then recounts it, dropping the passport as he does so.*

REGGIE: Well I'm damned ! Decided to be generous after all. Probably afraid I'd put him into my account of the expedition, and show him and his countrymen up in a bad light. A sort of bribe, eh, Scotty ? . . . Oh !

[*He turns round and finds he is alone. He puts the notes into his cigarette case.*

TERESA (*off*): I can't find your pipe anywhere. Where did you have it last ?

REGGIE (*absently*): I don't know. In there somewhere.

[*He makes a movement as if to take the money out again, hesitates, and then shuts the case quickly and slips it into his pocket as TERESA comes in.*

TERESA: I can't find it.

REGGIE: Never mind that now.

TERESA: But you will be so miserable without it.

REGGIE: We can't look for it now; the time's going on. I can hear Pancho's mules.

TERESA: I'll get my shawl.

REGGIE: No, Teresa, let's say good-bye here. (*Misunderstanding the look on her face*) I'm sorry, darling, but it's better here where we've been so happy. I couldn't bear it out there in front of those gaping natives. Tessa darling, don't be upset.

[*She suddenly sees his passport on the floor and goes and picks it up, looking inside to make sure there is nothing there.*

REGGIE: What's the matter, Tess ?

TERESA (*in a toneless voice*): It's your passport. It was on the floor.

REGGIE: Good Lord, yes ! I had it a moment ago, but I must have dropped it. I should have been in a mess if I'd gone without it. Tess darling, be brave. It won't be for long, not long.

TERESA (*in the same lifeless voice*): Good-bye, Reggie.

[*He kisses her but she remains motionless.*]

VOICE OFF: Ho-o-ah-ho-o !

REGGIE: I'm coming, Pancho. Good-bye, Tess. I'll soon be back.

[*He pauses at the door, but she does not move or look at him, and with a shrug of the shoulders, he goes out. Voices are heard off, and then the mules' hooves gradually dying away in the distance. After a moment SCOTTY comes to the door, looks in, and seeing TERESA, comes in.*]

SCOTTY: So he went without you, the dirty skunk.

TERESA: No, Scotty; I changed my mind. You were right; I belong to the village.

[*Moving over, she opens the Bible and looks at the paper pasted in the back. SCOTTY stands watching her, and a malicious smile spreads over his face as the tom-tom begins to beat again.*]

CURTAIN



Richard Hughes

THE MAN BORN TO BE HANGED

*A Play*

## CHARACTERS

MR. LENORA

DAVEY

BILL

MR. SPENCER

NELL

*This play was first performed by THE PORTMADOC PLAYERS at Portmadoc, and afterwards in London by the same Company at THE LYRIC THEATRE, HAMMERSMITH, on February 16th, 1924*

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SCENE: *The inside of a ruined cottage: quite small. Half the roof is off, and there are holes in the wall: a ramshackle door fastened with a log of wood up centre, and windows each side of it boarded up. Outside is nothing but darkness. The fire-place has fallen in, but someone has built a rough stone stove in the middle of the flagged floor: this is the only source of light. A pile of sodden rags in one corner: peeled wallpaper everywhere. During the action the storm weakens, and at last the moon shines through a hole in the roof.*

TIME: *A stormy November night.*

*As the curtain rises, the stage is pitch dark. Wind and rain audible, but above it the rhythmical and reverberant snoring of MR. LENORA, an unhappy looking tramp in dissolute middle-age. As soon as the audience is listening, there is the sound of splintering wood as DAVEY forces an entrance. He is a youth of twenty: tall and thin. He talks in a nondescript accent half Welsh, half Manchester; there is a suggestion of education about him, and his clothes are comparatively wearable. He pauses just inside the doorway.*

BILL (*off, distant*): Whisht, who's there?

*[He is an immense man, not tall but with long arms, a mountainous chest, and a broad flat face like a savage, though more cheerful in expression. He wears a knotted kerchief round his neck, a sleeveless coat of lion skin, bare tattooed arms, and bare head: baggy sailor trousers held up by a leather belt decorated with strips of snake-skin: under his trousers an iron foot is half visible. He carries a heavy kit-sack that clinks with metal.*

DAVEY: All right.

*[BILL stumps in, his iron foot clanking on the stone. He manages to strike a match: it goes out at once without showing anything. He gropes his way about.*

BILL (*by MR. LENORA*): Silly blighter! Drunk as a lord. Rolled himself in newspaper too, to keep the cold out.

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Guess it will serve our turn, though, friend. (*He continues to grope about, and with the help of the newspapers tries to build a fire in the dark.*) Whew, it's a crool night for sleeping rough ! God knows why I ever took to it. I got a little circus of my own laid up in London—the smartest *and* toughest *and* roughest little circus in the country, it is; waiting for the money to start it; and here I am walking the road like any poor blooming lug-biter. How long have you been on the road, friend ?

[*Suddenly the fire blazes up: DAVEY is seated L. of fire, BILL above it. MR. LENORA is lying flat on his back on pile of rags with a newspaper still round his legs.*]

DAVEY: Seven months come Christmas.

BILL: Coo, I been on it ever since I was a babby. Six year old, I was, when I hopped it.—Look at him now, a nice, sociable, matey sort of chap to pass a night with, ain't 'e ? (*He heaves a bit of rock on to the sleeping man's stomach: who hiccups suddenly and then goes on snoring.*) Wake up, you silly blighter ! Can't you see there's two gentlemen wanting to have a chat with you ? Wake up ! The Copper's after you ! It's closing-time ! Coo, I can't understand a chap like that, what drinks himself silly. Let's have a look at him. (*He heaves over on to one hand and holds a burning branch over the sleeper's face.*) I know him, too: chap called Lenora: I done him down last Worcester races. Won five pounds, he did: oh, he was roaring drunk that day. I fetched an old monkey's skull what I'd got in my pack, curio-like: I wired it on to a haddock's backbone, and told him it was a Mermaid's Anatomy. Young one. He paid me four pound for it, he did. He's been looking for me ever since, they tell me. But *I* don't care. Wake up, you skunk ! Don't you remember old Bill, what sold you the Anatomy ? You been looking for me, have you ? Eh ? Wake up !

[*Meanwhile DAVEY squeezes the water out of the legs of his trousers; takes his coat off, wrings it, and puts it on again.*]

DAVEY: You won't wake him, never. He's in for a good night's rest, that's what.

BILL: Look at him ! Born to be hanged, he is. See them eyebrows meeting ? Born to be hanged, that means. I ain't

a bit religious, but I'm very superstitious. *You* know, not Jesusy, but I do believe in a bit of luck. See them bits of snake-skin ?

DAVEY: Ah.

BILL: Do you think they're lucky, eh ? I do: holy, they are, holy snake. I got them out in Malay, same as where I learnt tattooing and the Magic Coffin Trick. But I ain't had a bit of luck, not since. Are you married ?

DAVEY: No.

BILL: That's right, friend: don't you be, neither. It's a silly duck what paddles always in the same puddle, *I* say.—I am.

DAVEY: What, you are ?

BILL: Married ! But I'm through with it. Look at that.

*[He rummages inside the front of his shirt, and pulls out an old pocket-book full of cuttings and photographs, which he takes out one by one.]*

See that ? That's me, slung up in chains sixty feet above deck, in seven pair of regulation handcuffs. See all the passengers staring ? I got out in four minutes, same as I said I would.—That's me as a little boy: you can guess I had a good home; white collar and all.—Ah, that's the one ! (DAVEY examines it with interest and due ceremony.) Now, would you call her 'andsome ?

DAVEY (*slowly*): Ah !

BILL (*disappointed*): Would you ? I wouldn't: not *real* 'andsome: not like one of them flash girls: that's my wife. (DAVEY looks at him a little incredulously.) Irish girl: Irish temper, too. Lumme ! Lord alone knows what I wanted to do it for ! We were married proper, *you* know, registry and all.

DAVEY: *You* was married to *her* !

BILL (*in an aggrieved tone*): I don't know what she was thinking about ! She's got birth, and she'd education, mind you: read easy as winking, she could: she 'adn't got no business to marry a chap like me ! Ought to know better,



she did ! (MR. LENORA mutters in his sleep. Turning on him in mock indignation, and parodying an Oxford accent) Now then, you low fellow, kindly don't interrupt ! (In own voice) Or I'll roll you out in the ruddy rain ! (Chuckles)—But I'm through with it ! Coo, lumme, what a life ! (Steps off.) Hello, who goes there ?

[Enter MR. SPENCER: he stands a moment motionless in the firelight. He is a small man, with that roundness of figure and thinness of limb which often comes of having too little to eat. He has a large straggly moustache, and a nervous trick of twitching his nose up and down like a rabbit's.

BILL: Walk up ! Walk up !

[MR. SPENCER blows the water out of his moustache: gives no greeting, and seats himself R. of fire, close to it. A woman follows at his heels; she has pulled up her skirt over her head, and her ragged petticoat flaps on her legs. Her shoe has a loose sole. She seats herself behind MR. SPENCER, away from the fire, half in light and half in shadow, her face hidden in her skirt.

Full bar to-night, gentlemen !—Poor Man's Inn, they call it, sleeping rough: At the Sign of the Ruddy Rain. A pint of old-and-mild all round, please, Joe !—Coo, I could do with a bit of grog inside me a night like this: crool, ain't it, Mr. Parker ?

MR. SPENCER (in a sullen, strident voice: his nose twitching): My name ain't Parker: it's Spencer: what you call me Parker for ?

BILL (shaking with mirth): Coo ! I don't know ! I can't think ! Now, whatever should I go and call him Parker for, eh, friend ?

[Digging DAVEY in the ribs, and roaring with laughter. DAVEY looks uncomfortable.

MR. SPENCER: 'Ere !

BILL: Well ?

MR. SPENCER: Stop it !

BILL (in mock seriousness): Don't take no offence ! I ain't a fighting man: I ain't that sort of chap. If a man wants to quarrel with me, I don't hit him, not I !—I just go up to

him friendly-like, and bite a piece right out of his blooming face ! (MR. SPENCER *snorts with indignation.*) All right, I ain't going to take a pull out of *your* mug, you needn't worry ! (He suddenly spins round with incredible swiftness, and thrusts his own face within an inch of MR. SPENCER's, letting out an appalling howl. MR. SPENCER tumbles over in consternation.) See now, that shook him ! (Innocently) It always shakes 'em ! It shook Nell ! I done it in the regist'y office. It shook the Regist'ar ! (Chuckling) He told me to remember it was a Solemn Occasion ! Coo !

MR. SPENCER (*slowly and provocatively*): You'd be a nice sort of chap to be married to, you would !

BILL (*impressively*): So I was ! But as I just done telling this gentleman here—what's your name, friend ?

DAVEY: Davey.

BILL: Mr. Davey !—I'm through with it !

MR. SPENCER: No one ain't ever through with it, don't you think it ! Through with marriage, indeed ! Whatever will you say next !

BILL: I left Nell, back at Oxford. Months ago, that was. Mind you, I was a good husband to her !

DAVEY: What was you doing at Oxford ?

BILL: Exercising my profession ! I got out of thirty-five feet of chain, seven pair of American Ratchet Handcuffs, and a strait waistcoat, I did ! Nell took the 'at round in the middle. In 'ere (*nodding at the bag, and getting into his showman manner*) I got handcuffs of all the ages: I got Figure-of-Eight—Regulation—American Ratchet—I got a pair with teeth on 'em, same as was used by the Savage Romans, and the Ancient Mammoths of the Bohemian Desert. I've studied 'em, like. See here ! (He puts his hand to his nose, and seems to extract a small metal instrument like a hollow clock key, but nicked like a whistle.) See that ? That's a master-key to all the handcuffs of Europe !—But it won't fit them American Ratchets: you want a bit of wire for them. (*Replaces it in nose, and sniffs loudly.*) I got a foot of wire, up the other side. (*Sniffs again.*)

DAVEY: Have you been in jail ?

MR. SPENCER: Course he has !

BILL: Yes, but I don't stop: I can't stand living in. Three weeks hard is enough for me: then I hop it, eh, Mr. Lenora ? (*Chucks another bit of rock at the sleeper.*) As I was saying, we had a good week of it: they're a bit of all right, them Oxford Police. But I didn't leave her, not till she come out of the 'firmary. I was always a good husband to her: careful, like. I hung on till she was right again. Nobody can't say I wasn't a good husband to her (*sentimentally*).

[MR. SPENCER *is getting more and more annoyed*.

DAVEY: What was the matter with 'er, Mister ?

BILL: Well, you see, we done have a bit of a row: too many girls, *you* know: she used to get wild if I brought 'em into the house. Threaten to kill me, she used to. Only her temper, *you* know: she didn't mean nothing by it: she was a good girl at heart. I just took up the poker; not to beat 'er, *you* know, just to learn her: and she trip up and broke her poor blooming ankle.

[*There is dead silence, except for MR. LENORA's snoring. MR. SPENCER ostentatiously takes off his boots and pours the water out of them: then begins to examine the condition of his feet.*

(*Sadly*) Month, she was, in the 'firmary. Pretty thin time of it, I had: my show was gone stale; oughtn't never do it more nor a week. I didn't take more nor a tanner a night. I was used to do the Magic Coffin Trick—shove Nell in a Coffin, padlocked 'and and foot each end, and sor it through the middle ! But I couldn't do it without Nell: you can't do it with any girl you see: she's got to be made that way, same as Nell was. Nor I couldn't think of nothing new: you know how it is: when you're in luck—your 'ead's fair full of new tricks: when you're down on it, you can't think of nothing. (*Brightening*) Coo, I remember down Llandudno way, oncet, I got a bit of wood, and I nailed thousands and thousands of lug-worms on to it, so as you couldn't see the wood for the worms ! Then I put it in a tank, and exhibited it as a marine monster, Pride of the Ocean ! When the silly worms waggled, you see, they swam it about ! I took pounds on pounds. Stuff in the papers, there was—"Unknown Monster Captured at Llandudno."

That put the wind up me, that did !—Nell, one night she broke it up. I said I'd throwed it back in its native ocean, I did. (*Chuckles*) They offered a reward to anyone what could catch it again. All out fishing, for weeks they was. Coo, lumme !

MR. SPENCER: It'd have served you right if you'd been lagged !

BILL (*with exaggerated innocence*): Would it now, Mr. Parker ? D'you know, that never occurred to me ! Funny, ain't it ?

DAVEY: But what did you do at Oxford, then, Mister ?

BILL: Do ? There weren't nothing to do, but fire-eating ! But it's terrible hard on the kidneys, that is: I was awful bad inside. No one can't do it for more than six months, even them what's used to it. Don't *you* ever take to fire-eating, Mr. Parker !

MR. SPENCER: Thank you kindly, I'm sure !

BILL: That's right, friend ! Why, it ain't hardly worth the paraffin ! I 'adn't got more nor half a crown in the world, time Nell was coming out. So I shoves a bob into 'er bed: and I beat it.

DAVEY: Did she know you was going ?

BILL: *Naow !* Make a scene, she would 'ave. She was real fond of me. I was a good 'usband to 'er. I don't suppose she's got over it yet, proper. Terrible fond, she was (*sentimentally*).

MR. SPENCER (*puffing with anger, his nose twitching up and down as if he had the ague, in a shrill voice*): That's a nice edifying little story to tell a party of strangers ! Some of you chaps ain't got no decency, no nuffink ! Washing your dirty linen in public ! Ought to be ashamed of yourself, you did !

BILL (*in genuine surprise*): Why, dirty linen ? I don't see——

MR. SPENCER: Yes, dirty linen ! You're as bad as a divorce court, you are ! You ought to be in jail, you did !

[*He fidgets nervously all over. The woman has thrown back the skirt off her head, revealing a face of great natural beauty, now twisted and set in rage.*]



BILL stares at her stupidly: slowly his expression changes to delight and an uncouth tenderness.

BILL: Well, I'm——

[Her hand is hidden in a fold in her dress: there is a revolver-crack, and BILL, rigid for a moment, pitches right over sideways on to his face. DAVEY sits quite still, his eyes half out of his head.]

MR. SPENCER (still seated; slowly): Whatever 'ave you been and gone and done!

[He suddenly jumps to his feet, staring at NELL, saying "Crikey!" two or three times with increasing emphasis. Lets out a little screech. Then: "Lumme!" Then he pokes BILL with his finger, suddenly grabs up his boots in his hand and rushes out into the rain, hollering with terror as he runs. Exit.]

NELL takes no notice of MR. SPENCER. The passion of her face changes to a sort of impersonal hardness: in a calm voice, her eyes all the while fixed on BILL.

NELL: That'll learn him. He won't do that again. (Turning to DAVEY, the soft Irish in her voice increasing) Stranger, this is none of your business.

DAVEY (pulling himself together): No, indeed!

NELL: You had better be going.

DAVEY (jerking his head towards the door after MR. SPENCER): That one's gone.

NELL: He is gone surely.

DAVEY (slowly): I'll not go yet.

NELL: As you like, stranger.

[She rises to her feet and flings away the revolver: it falls beside LENORA.]

DAVEY: What was you doing in company with him?

NELL: I didn't care.

DAVEY: No?

NELL: No.

DAVEY: But it's as well to be in company with a man of sorts, indeed, when you're on the road.



NELL (*listlessly*): It might.

DAVEY: And there's beautiful you are, indeed.

NELL: Aye.

[DAVEY rises too; there is an awkward pause. LENORA hiccups.]

DAVEY: Did you see them eyebrows?

NELL: I did not.

DAVEY: Meeting! Do you get me?

NELL: I do not.

[Another pause.]

DAVEY: Don't you be losing heart.

NELL (*looking at him for the first time*): Losing heart?

DAVEY: They'll never know.

NELL (*calmly*): They will not.

DAVEY: I'll not tell.

NELL: Why should you?

[Pause.]

DAVEY: Shall we be going?

NELL: Go if you wish, stranger.

DAVEY: I'll not go yet. (*Pause. Awkwardly*) Would you—come in company with me a bit?

NELL: It's a kind heart you have, young man: thoughtful of your friends.

DAVEY (*uneasy*): I don't see——

NELL: No: you don't, that's true.

DAVEY (*his accent grows more Welsh in excitement*): I'd love you, Nell! I'd love you! I'd—I'd look after you! I'd take you away out of it.

NELL (*sternly*): Boy, wouldn't there be a fear creeping up your back at night, to be with such as me?

DAVEY: No, indeed; what's a killing, anyway?

NELL: You're right there, anyway; what is it?

DAVEY: You'll forget it, surely.

NELL: Will I, surely? And will you, surely?

DAVEY: I wouldn't fear.

NELL: Brave boy!

[*Tense pause.*]

DAVEY (*sulkily*): I'd not ask nothing of you.

NELL: Them as don't ask, don't get.

[*DAVEY suddenly seizes her in his arms, and kisses her: then starts back: she remains quite impassive.*]

DAVEY: Woman, you're as cold as ice!

NELL: What did you expect, young man?

DAVEY: You're not angry, are you?

NELL: Angry? (*Laughs.*) No, young man, I am not angry with you.

DAVEY: Will you come then, Nell?

NELL: Do you want me? Certain?

DAVEY: You're a grand woman, indeed! I couldn't kill a man like that, and never turn my hair.

NELL (*weighing him up*): No; I think you could not.

DAVEY: Come away, Nell: wouldn't you be afeard, walking alone at nights with the memory of *that*?

NELL: Walking? (*She begins to laugh.*) It's walking shall I be, walking at nights up and down, up and down: for ever and ever I'll be walking! They'll see me in here at nights, walking, they will! Mother of Heaven, it's scared they'll be of me!

[*She bursts into laughter: quietly at first, then like a cataract; flings her head up and screams with laughter; her hair comes down, her eyes stream with tears: still she laughs.*]

DAVEY (*shrinking back with horror*): God go with you, you poor woman, for I dare not!

NELL (*growing suddenly calm; with intense emphasis*): No, that you daren't!

[*Calmly begins to plait her hair over her shoulder; coils it round her head and pins it. Then suddenly falls forward on her face, scratching at the ground, crying "Bill! Bill!" in a little husky voice. DAVEY turns away, walks down stage biting at his fingers. Suddenly she kneels up, pats her hair, rises, and disappears into the darkness: apparently by the door, but in reality in a corner of the room. Pause.*]

BILL (*sitting up*): Whisht, friend, is she gone?

DAVEY (*jumping like a shot rabbit*): Ai-ai!

BILL: Coo, lumme, that shook her!

DAVEY: Aren't you hurt, man?

BILL: Hurt? Lord, no! (*Chuckles*) Take it from me, friend: give a woman a gun, and she'll miss you at six inches; but give her a knife, and she never goes wrong, never! (*Half fiercely*) But that'll learn her not to go killing me! That ought to be a lesson to her, eh, friend? Lord, she was pretty near mad, she was, she loved me that crool! Poor girl, she'll be that remorseful. But she didn't ought to have done it, eh, friend? She didn't ought to go a shooting of me! Let it be a lesson to 'er, I says. I never thought she would have done it, not really: I didn't think it of her, truth I didn't!—You thought *you'd* go off with her, did you? Coo, lumme, what a joke! You are a caution!

[*Roars with laughter, slapping his thigh; then rises, and goes towards MR. LENORA.*]

DAVEY: I—I——

BILL (*addressing MR. LENORA in a serious voice*): 'Tisn't your time, yet, my friend! (*Picks up revolver.*) Though you haven't got *that* cove to thank you didn't wake up in clink to-morrow. Lumme, they'd have strung him sure, what with the gun being by him and his threatening me and all!—Though I'm not saying it wouldn't be better for him if they did. It's got to come, sooner or later; you can't go against a sure sign like them eyebrows; and it'd be better for his soul to be hung when he hadn't done nothing than waiting till he has, won't it, friend?

DAVEY: You're right there, Mister.

BILL (*turning on him, and playing with revolver*): Now, did you really think, Mr. Davey, she'd go off along of you?

DAVEY (*shrinking*): I didn't mean nothing.

BILL: Oh, you didn't, didn't you! (*With a twinkle in his eye*) Kissing a married woman! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!

DAVEY: She weren't a married woman, Mister: she were a widow!

BILL: Well, kissing a widow what's—what's made 'erself one, then!

DAVEY: And you lying quiet, and not saying nothing! It isn't decent! Watching another man kissing your wife, and you not saying nothing! I wonder you didn't holler out: I should.

BILL: Would you? I wouldn't: bless you, no, I hadn't no cause to worry. I know Nell! I know 'er better than you do, young man, an' better nor you ever will!

DAVEY: You seem very sure of yourself!

BILL (*simply*): I am.

DAVEY: Don't you never make mistakes?

BILL: Not as how I can remember. You're young yet, Davey, my boy; you got a deal to learn.

DAVEY: Well, you aren't a gaffer yet.

BILL: That's true, but I guess I'm through with learning. Why, I mind I been in clink seven times by what I was your age! And let myself out too, not waited to be let out. Coo, there ain't nothing about locks I don't know: give me any new patent combination, and I guarantee to have it open inside of ten minutes. Them letter-locks: my ear's that sharp I can tell by just clicking them round when I come to the right one! Or see here, friend: you lock a door on the inside, and bolt it, and leave the key in the lock, and I'll guarantee to have the bolts back, and the key outside the door, and the door unlocked inside two minutes.

DAVEY: However would you do that, Mister?

BILL: Ah ! That's a secret, that is ! I learnt it from a young Polish chap, what lived in Budapest. (*Pause.*) Coo, lumme, them Hungarian women ! Hot lot of gypsies, they are ! As I was saying, give a woman——

[*The moon suddenly struggles through the clouds and, shining through a hole in the roof, shows NELL sitting sideways against the wall, huddled up.*

DAVEY (*clutching his arm*): What's that ?

BILL: Nell !—Nell ! (*Crosses quickly and carries her to firelight.*) Oh, my poor bloody little Nell !

DAVEY: You've done it, you !

BILL: Nell !—Nell, you little joker, stop shamming, or I'll give you what for ! Stop it !—Wake up !

DAVEY: She's not shamming.

BILL (*touching blood with finger ; shaking head and screwing up eyes*): Ow ! You didn't oughter, you little limb. What you done it for ?

DAVEY: Damn you, you ! *Yr hên llofrudd i ti !<sup>1</sup>*

BILL: You was . . . you was . . . who ever would have thought it ! You and me . . . I didn't . . .

[*Tableau ; moon goes in ; fire dying.*

SLOW CURTAIN

[*The curtain rises again for a moment, showing the stage empty except for the body of NELL and the sleeping MR. LENORA.*

<sup>1</sup> You old murderer, you !





Ronald Elwy Mitchell

A ROGUE IN A BED

*A Comedy*

## CHARACTERS

UNCLE ELIAS PRICE – an old fraud

HANNAH – his daughter

MERCY LLOYD

MODRYB JANE

MRS. MORRIS THE BAKERY

CAPTAIN HUGHES

JOHN ROBERTS THE FISH

AHOLIBAH JONES

MOSES ROBERTS

HUGH PARRY THE POST

MISS PUGH BACH

} villagers

(“ Bach ” is an affectionate diminutive, meaning “ little ”  
or “ dear.”)

SCENE: *A large stone-floored kitchen in the west of North Wales. The outer door is back L., and there is a very wide old-fashioned Welsh fireplace, back centre. In the corner, back R., is a cupboard, with a broom leaning against it. Along the R. wall a bed is placed, its head near the warmth of the fire. A low stool stands in front of the fire, beside the bed: a high-backed fireside bench is L. of the fireplace and at right angles to it, and there is a rocking-chair also near the fire. Down R. is a door leading to the rest of the cottage, with a chair below it. The window is in the centre of the L. wall, and a table stands in front of it, with a chair above and a chair below. Through the window, a low stone wall can be seen bordering the road, and behind it, the late afternoon sky. When the outer door is opened, there is another glimpse of wall and sky, seen through a corrugated iron porch.*

*In the bed sits UNCLE ELIAS PRICE, wearing a flannel nightcap and spectacles. UNCLE ELIAS still wears nightshirts. By his side, on the low stool, sits MERCY LLOYD, a stupid village wench. On the other side of the room, in the chair below the table L., waiting for a consultation and dozing gently, sits MODRYB JANE. UNCLE ELIAS has a large book open on his knees. It was once a family album with heavy clasps and a padded cover.*

UNCLE ELIAS (*looking at his book*): In my book of the stars, Mercy Lloyd, it says that a young man of the village is courting you.

MERCY (*excitedly*): Yes indeed. Idris Jones it is.

UNCLE ELIAS (*glancing up*): Hush !

MERCY: I'm sorry.

UNCLE ELIAS: He is dark and tall. Twenty-three years old he is.

[MERCY *nods eagerly*.

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And my book says that he lives on one of the little streets by the harbour.

MERCY: Castle Street.

UNCLE ELIAS: Who's doing this, you or me?

MERCY: Oh, it's you, Uncle Elias. Wonderful, you are. It is Idris Jones.

UNCLE ELIAS: If you marry him, Mercy Lloyd, a good faithful wife you'll make him. Won't you?

MERCY: Yes, indeed. (*Hesitantly*) But shall I marry him? That's what I came here to know.

UNCLE ELIAS: That is for you to decide. Have you no pride? Are you going to do nothing for yourself?

MERCY: Oh, Uncle Elias, won't you tell me?

UNCLE ELIAS (*darkly*): You want to know too much. Think, girl, think what it means to know as much as I know! Like this book here, your whole life lies open before my eyes, and not only yours, but everyone's. I could sell my knowledge for a thousand pounds. I could be rich and powerful. Do I do it? No. Just a poor old Welshman among the mountains is what I am. I do this not for money, but for the service of my fellow creatures. If I were out for gain I would tell all. Discretion keeps me silent and keeps me poor. It is a wise man who knows when to be silent. (*He shuts his book with a snap.*) That will be two and sixpence, Mercy Lloyd.

MERCY: Two and sixpence?

UNCLE ELIAS: Only two and sixpence, because you are a neighbour's daughter and I used to go to the same chapel as your mother and father when I had the use of my legs.

[*She pays him.*]

MERCY: How *are* your legs, Uncle Elias?

UNCLE ELIAS: Pretty fair only, but I knew what was coming to them. I knew it long beforehand.

MERCY: Ah, the creature, waiting for the blow to come, isn't it? It's a great comfort you've been to me, Uncle Elias, and thank you very big. Good day to you.



UNCLE ELIAS: Good day to you, Mercy Lloyd.

[*She goes out by the door up L.*

(*Getting ready for the next consultation.*) Something I can do for you now, Modryb Jane?

[MODRYB JANE *still dozes.*

Modryb Jane ! Modryb Jane ! !

MODRYB JANE (*starting at his voice*): Yes, Uncle Elias. I'm coming.

[*She hurries over to him and sits on the stool.*

UNCLE ELIAS: Is everything all right?

MODRYB JANE: That I don't really know, Uncle Elias; no indeed, that I don't.

UNCLE ELIAS: Tell me, Modryb Jane, did you do as I told you last Wednesday night?

MODRYB JANE: Yes, Uncle Elias. I made a big fire and locked the door, boiled the three sprigs of heather you told me to take off the mountain just as the sun was setting, and drank the water. Then I danced three times on one leg around the table with an egg in each hand.

UNCLE ELIAS: Three times, you say?

MODRYB JANE: It was three times you said, Uncle Elias.

UNCLE ELIAS: Yes, yes. Go on.

MODRYB JANE (*a little unnerved*): Well, then I threw the eggs in the fire like you said, and while they crackled I shouted, "Athaliah the daughter of Jezebel, where are you?" . . . thirty-seven times.

UNCLE ELIAS (*gravely*): What happened?

MODRYB JANE: Nothing ! (*After a pause*) Oh, yes. Aholibah Jones next door knocked on the wall.

UNCLE ELIAS: Did you stop?

MODRYB JANE: No. I went right on to the end. Then I knocked and she stopped and I said quite distinct, "Go you to hell, Aholibah Jones, where you belong." (*Penitently*) Was I wrong to say that?

UNCLE ELIAS (*fervently*): No indeed. That was quite right, Modryb Jane. Did anything happen then?

MODRYB JANE: Nothing at all.

UNCLE ELIAS: There's fine for you! (*Wagging a finger*) Do you know what would have happened to you and you going out that night?

MODRYB JANE: No. What?

UNCLE ELIAS: A dog from one of the farms on the mountain went mad on Wednesday.

MODRYB JANE (*much impressed*): No!

UNCLE ELIAS: Yes indeed! Bitten you'd have been all over. (*Graphically*) Back to your little cottage you'd have gone with the blood trickling down into your boots and one of your ears half off.

MODRYB JANE (*involuntarily putting her hands to her ears*): Wel, bobl annwyl! Oh, Mr. Elias Price, that grateful I am to you for this. (*A pause.*) How much do I pay you now?

UNCLE ELIAS: Two shillings and sixpence only, Modryb Jane, because you are a poor woman living alone on the mountain road without a man to work for you.

[*She pays him.*]

MODRYB JANE: Thank you, thank you, Uncle Elias. I'll tell everyone of this. (*Going to the door up L., ecstatically*) Oh, it's wonderful you are, yes indeed.

[*She goes out.*]

UNCLE ELIAS *drops his book on the floor L. of the bed, and chuckles; then calls:*

UNCLE ELIAS: Hannah! (*More loudly*) Hannah!

[*HANNAH comes in through the door R.*]

HANNAH (*entering*): Well, what is it you want now?

[*She goes round to L. of the bed.*]

UNCLE ELIAS: What have you got for supper?

HANNAH: It's not tea-time yet.

UNCLE ELIAS (*excitedly*): Hannah! Five shillings I've got.

HANNAH: Five shillings ?

UNCLE ELIAS: Yes indeed. (*Showing the coins*) Look you ! I had it from those simpletons.

HANNAH (*gently scolding*): *Dadi bach*, you're overdoing it.  
[*She straightens out the bedclothes.*]

UNCLE ELIAS: Get something nice for supper and it's maybe a new dress you can have at the end of the week.

HANNAH: Ah, wicked it is to be robbing those poor people. Who were they ?

UNCLE ELIAS: Modryb Jane the mountain road, and Mercy Lloyd.

HANNAH (*propping his pillows afresh*): Well indeed, Modryb Jane had a bit of money from Nain Tan y Grisiau, and she saves money living in a cottage alone without a man to feed ; and they say that Mercy Lloyd has a monthly allowance from the Squire, and why shouldn't she when everyone can see that she has the same nose and mouth as him ; but five shillings ! Can I really have a new dress ? Ah, but the Lord will never forgive you.

UNCLE ELIAS: The Lord helps those who help themselves.

HANNAH: He didn't mean it in just that way, *dadi*.

UNCLE ELIAS: Ah, but so stupid they are, and they walking on two legs, and here's me not able to move from my bed. Something I must do, isn't it ?

HANNAH (*busying herself with the room*): Old Mrs. Lewis does crochet and sells what she does.

UNCLE ELIAS (*scornfully*): Crochet ! Would you have your father sink to that ? Would you have me knitting socks, or maybe pink caps for the vicar's babies ?

HANNAH (*at the fireplace, doubtfully*): Well, I——

UNCLE ELIAS: No, Hannah ! With the use of my legs taken away, God meant me to use my brain.

HANNAH: Well, you'll regret it when you've used it once too often, if you haven't done that already.

UNCLE ELIAS: What do you mean—already ?

HANNAH (*going over to the table by the window*): You were wrong about Captain Hughes.

UNCLE ELIAS: Did I say anything about Captain Hughes?

HANNAH (*tidying the table*): Yes. Don't you remember?

UNCLE ELIAS: No. What did I say about him?

HANNAH: You don't remember? You said he was going to die.

UNCLE ELIAS: Going to die? Now when did I say that?

HANNAH: All excited you were when they called in last Saturday night with the drink.

UNCLE ELIAS: Well?

[*He begins to show anxiety.*]

HANNAH: You know how you never like me to tell you the foolish things you say when you drink.

UNCLE ELIAS: Oh, leave that out, woman, and come to the point, will you.

HANNAH: Don't you remember anything about it?

UNCLE ELIAS (*shouting now*): No. Not a thing.

HANNAH (*turning to him and giving him her full attention*): Well, when it was soon after half-night, you pointed your finger like this at Captain Hughes and said, shaking your head so sad (*suiting the action to the words*): "Poor man, dead you'll be by this time on Monday." There was a crack in your voice, as you said it.

UNCLE ELIAS (*seriously alarmed*): Never mind the crack! Did I say all that?

HANNAH: You certainly did.

UNCLE ELIAS: What's to-day?

HANNAH: Tuesday.

UNCLE ELIAS: *Diar annwyl!*

HANNAH: I don't think he died, after all, whatever.

UNCLE ELIAS: Of course he didn't. Do you think he'd do it to oblige me? (*Hopefully*) What makes you think he didn't die?

HANNAH: Well, I saw him this morning in the market.

UNCLE ELIAS: Why didn't you say so before?

HANNAH (*clinging to a straw*): He might have passed away this afternoon, isn't it?

UNCLE ELIAS (*with scorn*): Passed away this afternoon! Why should he pass away with no warning in the middle of the afternoon?

HANNAH: Well, indeed, why not? (*With a vague gesture*) People *do* go beyond in the afternoon, don't they?

UNCLE ELIAS (*gloomily*): Not Captain Hughes. (*Suddenly*) Why didn't you tell me all this before?

HANNAH: I didn't like to. Besides, I thought you remembered and didn't want to talk about it.

UNCLE ELIAS: I don't remember anything except—wait! It's coming back to me. Was Mrs. Morris the Bakery here?

HANNAH: Yes.

UNCLE ELIAS (*pointing to the chair below the table*): Sitting over there?

HANNAH: Well, she moved around. She'd been drinking too.

UNCLE ELIAS: And Moses Roberts?

HANNAH: Yes indeed.

UNCLE ELIAS: And Hugh Parry the Post? And Miss Pugh back?

HANNAH: Yes.

UNCLE ELIAS: It's all coming back. It was just after half-night, you say.

HANNAH: Yes. The hands on the clock were beginning to divide.

UNCLE ELIAS: I remember it now.

HANNAH: Why did you do it?

UNCLE ELIAS: I was sleepy. Talking and singing, they were. I wanted them to go home.

HANNAH: You said *that* to send them home?

UNCLE ELIAS: They went, didn't they?



6904  
HANNAH (*grimly*): Yes indeed, they went. Captain Hughes turned as pale as the ashes in the grate. Then he got up and backed away, looking at that long finger of yours as if it was the pistol that would shoot him into a cold corpse. Then you said, "Moses Roberts, I want to tell *you* something."

UNCLE ELIAS: I don't remember that. What did Moses Roberts say?

HANNAH: Not a word, but he shot out of that door with the rest at his heels, and at the bottom of the hill they were all before you could count ten.

UNCLE ELIAS: *Diar annwyl*, now I've done it, isn't it? (*With hope*) Do you think maybe they'd forget?

HANNAH: Would you forget if someone told you it was only two days you had to live?

UNCLE ELIAS: All drunk they were like myself.

HANNAH: Well and sober they became when you came out with that.

UNCLE ELIAS: Didn't they know I'd had too much to drink?

HANNAH: Not thinking of you they were at that moment, you may be sure. You might have told the lot of them they'd perish before morning, and you sitting up in bed red in the face with the drink, and your cap over one ear, and your long finger pointing at them—oh indeed, it was a dreadful sight, I tell you.

[*A murmuring is heard outside.*]

UNCLE ELIAS (*sitting up*): What's that noise?

HANNAH (*running to the window*): It's them. Oh, Lord, there's Captain Hughes at the head of them. I've never seen him looking so alive.

UNCLE ELIAS: And me not able to raise one foot to escape them. What shall I do?

HANNAH: Shall I lock the door against them?

UNCLE ELIAS: Oh, what's the use? They'll batter it to pieces and kill me with my own timber.

HANNAH: They don't look dangerous. Why, it's laughing they are.

UNCLE ELIAS: Laughing?

HANNAH: Yes. Moses Roberts is splitting his sides out there on the road.

UNCLE ELIAS: I don't like that at all. No indeed.

HANNAH: They've got things with them, too.

UNCLE ELIAS: What sort of things?

HANNAH: John Roberts has a spade.

UNCLE ELIAS (*turning pale*): A spade?

HANNAH: Maybe straight from the field working he's come. Oh, Mrs. Morris is carrying a rope.

UNCLE ELIAS: Oh, God! What's that for?

HANNAH (*coming away from the window*): Hush! They're coming now.

[*She crosses to the bed.*]

UNCLE ELIAS: I'll talk as if nothing had happened. Is my cap straight?

HANNAH (*straightening his cap*): Do you want your spectacles on or off?

UNCLE ELIAS (*nervously*): Oh, off, Hannah, in case they hit me, isn't it?

[*He settles himself stiffly in bed, sitting bolt upright. HANNAH puts his spectacles away on the chimney-piece.*]

Here! Take the five shillings and hide it. We'll have that, whatever!

[*HANNAH takes the money and puts it away in her dress. The door up L. opens quietly and seven villagers troop in. MRS. MORRIS THE BAKERY is heavily built and sluttish, CAPTAIN HUGHES bewhiskered and marine, JOHN ROBERTS THE FISH crafty and smiling, AHOLIBAH JONES a born fighter, MOSES ROBERTS an acid little man, MISS PUGH BACH a short woman with a limp and a squeaky voice—she carries a stick—and HUGH PARRY THE POST just an oaf.*]

JOHN ROBERTS carries a spade and MRS. MORRIS a rope.

UNCLE ELIAS and HANNAH, who is standing by the top end of the bed, gaze at them with astonishment. The seven villagers line up across the room, ignoring the householders.

MRS. MORRIS *goes to the rocking-chair by the fire, CAPTAIN HUGHES takes up a central position; the others come in and group themselves over L., AHOLIBAH JONES and MISS PUGH BACH sitting in the chairs above and below the table.*

MRS. MORRIS: Yes indeed, he was a good man.

CAPTAIN HUGHES: And so wise, reading the stars and saying what would happen, even to his own death.

JOHN ROBERTS: To think, Captain Hughes, that he was here, living and breathing, laughing and talking and drinking with ourselves.

AHOLIBAH: Ah, it's sad, yes indeed, isn't it?

[HANNAH and UNCLE ELIAS look at each other in bewilderment.

MOSES ROBERTS: Only two days!

MISS PUGH BACH: Well, happy he is now, whatever.

UNCLE ELIAS *(in a hoarse whisper)*: What are they talking about?

HANNAH: Ssh!

HUGH PARRY: Yes, I can see him now, riding a golden chariot across the sky. There's a great light on him and a harp in his hand.

MISS PUGH BACH: He's playing it.

MRS. MORRIS: There's a grand sight for you. Will you look at the sparks leaping from the horses' hoofs?

AHOLIBAH: And will you listen to the singing?

[*The seven listen raptly, then turn to each other in a whispering huddle, over by the table L.*

HANNAH: Haven't they seen us or is it a joke they're playing?

UNCLE ELIAS *(nervously)*: Who are they talking about?

HANNAH: Well indeed, I couldn't say for sure, but I think it's you.

UNCLE ELIAS: Me?

HANNAH: Yes. Don't you see? They're all alive.

UNCLE ELIAS: Well, so am I.

[*On the sound of HANNAH's voice, the others have looked around, curiously.*

CAPTAIN HUGHES: Who was she talking to?

HUGH PARRY: It must have been his spirit.

MISS PUGH BACH (*rising*): Well indeed, would you believe it, his spirit talking, with him lying there so cold and still.

HANNAH: Oh, goodness me.

UNCLE ELIAS (*prodding HANNAH*): Go and talk to them, Hannah.

HANNAH: Hush a minute!

AHOLIBAH (*also rising*): We might sing a hymn around him first.

UNCLE ELIAS: Oh, Hannah!

MOSES ROBERTS: Yes. Let's sing a hymn.

UNCLE ELIAS: Friends and fellow villagers, won't you listen——

JOHN ROBERTS (*interrupting*): What hymn shall we sing?

CAPTAIN HUGHES: It must be a sad one, isn't it? I know.

[*He breaks into the singing of "Dole," "Ai marw raid i mi," repeating the last two lines, Welsh fashion, and they all join, standing in a group C., ending with a dismal "Amen."*]

UNCLE ELIAS: Hannah, I don't like this at all. Say something to them.

HANNAH (*coming forward and singling out CAPTAIN HUGHES*): Will you all make yourselves at home, and something I'll get you to drink.

[*She is C. The others have found their way back to the L. of the room, leaving CAPTAIN HUGHES L. C.*]

CAPTAIN HUGHES (*as if seeing her for the first time*): Ah, there you are, Hannah, you poor girl.

MRS. MORRIS (*back at the fireplace*): Come to me, cariad. I'm a mother.

HANNAH: What's the matter with you?

JOHN ROBERTS (*L.*): Look at the brave front she puts on, isn't it?

MISS PUGH BACH (*down L.*): And she just new bereaved.

[*She sits in the chair below the table.*]

HANNAH: Oh, you're joking. Stop it now and sit down, will you? It was all in joke on Saturday night.

MOSES ROBERTS (*L.*): Well, listen to that. A joke, she says, with her father lying there before us in his winding sheet.

UNCLE ELIAS (*suddenly bold*): I'm not dead, you old fool.

CAPTAIN HUGHES (*going to L. of the bed and kneeling*): We prayed and we prayed that it would not come true.

HUGH PARRY (*following him to the bottom end of the bed*): And the calm way he said it, too.

HANNAH (*returning to L. of top end of the bed*): Said what?

HUGH PARRY: Didn't you hear him? He raised his hand and prophesied. He said that he himself would be gone before Tuesday dawn.

UNCLE ELIAS (*furiously pointing at CAPTAIN HUGHES*): It was that old dodderer I said would be gone, not myself.

HANNAH: Be quiet. They won't speak to you, so worse for you not to get used to it.

CAPTAIN HUGHES (*rising and returning C.*): His words were like honey on his tongue.

MRS. MORRIS (*sitting in the rocking-chair*): I shall never forget the way he said he'd be passing away.

UNCLE ELIAS (*shouting with temper and slapping the bed*): But I'm *not* dead.

AHOLIBAH (*having returned to her chair above the table*): With the angels he is now.

UNCLE ELIAS: You old she-devil. What do you know of angels?

HUGH PARRY: Hannah, we'll do all we can to help you bury him.

UNCLE ELIAS (*in a horrified whisper*): Bury me?

HANNAH: You'll carry your joking a little too far, and then you'll be sorry. Look what he's done for you all.

MISS PUGH BACH: He's got to be buried, hasn't he?

JOHN ROBERTS: It wouldn't be nice, no indeed, to let him lie here for very long.



CAPTAIN HUGHES: It would have been fine, wouldn't it, to have a real coffin for him?

MRS. MORRIS: It's sad we're so poor, but in years to come, who will know, isn't it, that we buried him simple?

HUGH PARRY: Have you the rope there, Mrs. Morris?

[*Those who are sitting rise and they all approach the bed:*

HUGH PARRY and MRS. MORRIS get to the R. of it.

MRS. MORRIS (*coming round the head of the bed to R.*): I have indeed. So this is the end of Uncle Elias Price.

UNCLE ELIAS: We've each had our little joke. Let's shake hands and all have a cup of tea, yes? Hannah will make it, won't you?

HANNAH: Yes, *dadi bach*!

[*She goes to the fireplace and busies herself with a kettle.*

CAPTAIN HUGHES (*at the bottom end of the bed*): Lift him gently now.

AHOLIBAH (*top L. of the bed*): Yes. We wouldn't want him to tumble out on the way to the graveyard.

HUGH PARRY: No indeed.

[*They remove the bedclothes.*

UNCLE ELIAS: Oh, help me, Hannah!

HANNAH: I'm putting on the tea now. Good tea it is. We have *bara brith*, too, and butter from Pentrebychan.

[*They begin lifting him.* JOHN ROBERTS and MOSES ROBERTS are L. of the middle of the bed.

MISS PUGH BACH (*bottom L. of the bed*): More serious thing than drinking tea we have to do now.

UNCLE ELIAS: Hannah, pass me my book!

[*The villagers drop him quickly.* HANNAH comes down and hands him the book, having picked it up from the floor.

AHOLIBAH (*looking towards the fireplace, genially*): Well it will be nice to drink tea.

JOHN ROBERTS: Very good is *bara brith*.

MRS. MORRIS: Pentrebychan butter is the best.

[UNCLE ELIAS takes the book and opens it. Then he speaks. Meantime those on the L. of the bed have backed away to C.]

UNCLE ELIAS: This is the spirit of Uncle Elias Price speaking from above where he is riding a golden chariot in all the glory of heaven.

[*The villagers scatter. HUGH PARRY and CAPTAIN HUGHES get down R. by the door. MRS. MORRIS and AHOLIBAH go to the fireplace. MISS PUGH BACH goes to down L. JOHN and MOSES ROBERTS retreat to up L., by the door.*]

Sparks are leaping from the hoofs of his horses and all the angels are singing. Will you listen to them?

CAPTAIN HUGHES (*down R., nervously*): Will you hurry with the tea, Hannah. Not much longer I can be staying.

[*He crosses to R. C.*]

UNCLE ELIAS (*chanting in a far-off voice*): Hannah, my living daughter, will you lock the door and put the key into the hand of the corpse that is lying all white and waxy in the winding sheet on the bed in the kitchen.

[*HANNAH starts to go up L.*]

JOHN ROBERTS: For why would he be doing that, tell me?

MRS. MORRIS: Stop her, Moses Roberts.

MOSES ROBERTS (*clutching HANNAH tremulously*): Will you let me go, Hannah bach, before you lock the door? I have to be feeding my pigs.

CAPTAIN HUGHES (*crossing up L. and seizing MOSES by the arm*): No, you don't, Moses Roberts. We all stay together.

JOHN ROBERTS: That's right. You wouldn't leave a funeral before you'd buried the body, isn't it?

CAPTAIN HUGHES (*longing to be off*): No, indeed, no!

[*HANNAH has now locked the door and given the key to UNCLE ELIAS. She goes to the fireplace to prepare the tea. This sinister action has put terror into the villagers.*]

HANNAH: Sit you down now and make yourselves comfortable while the water boils.

[*She places the stool by the fireplace for AHOLIBAH; MRS. MORRIS sits in the rocking-chair, MOSES ROBERTS sits in the chair above the table L., JOHN ROBERTS and CAPTAIN HUGHES remain standing up L., MISS PUGH BACH takes the chair below the table L., whilst HUGH PARRY sits on the chair down R. by the door. HANNAH gets on with her tea-making.*]

MRS. MORRIS: Well indeed, I hadn't thought to stay so long.

JOHN ROBERTS (*pathetically attempting a change of subject*): Are you going to the sheep-dog trials on Saturday, Moses?

MOSES ROBERTS: Yes indeed, I think I will, if it doesn't rain, isn't it?

UNCLE ELIAS: Uncle Elias was wise in his earthly life, but he is wiser now. He knew all when he was living on the earth and ministering to the needs of the people of his village, but he knows more than all now, for he can read your very hearts and drag out the secrets before your eyes that you would give your fortune to keep hidden till the Judgment Day.

[*He puts the book on the floor again.*]

MISS PUGH BACH (*with agitation*): Can I help you with the tea, Hannah?

AHOLIBAH: Let me.

[*She starts to move, but all are frozen to their places when*  
UNCLE ELIAS *speaks again.*]

UNCLE ELIAS (*turning to her*): Do you remember, Mrs. Morris, the pound of butter that went last week from your shop, and the money from the till and the picture postcards that lay on the counter? Go you to Moses Roberts's house and look for them there.

MOSES ROBERTS (*leaping up indignantly*): That's a lie. I didn't.

[*Mrs. MORRIS turns round and fixes him with a cold, suspicious stare.*]

CAPTAIN HUGHES (*confronting him up L.*): Are you forgetting, Moses Roberts, that we came here on a solemn errand?

MOSES ROBERTS (*his whiskers quivering*): Solemn errand be damned! I'm an honest, God-fearing man, and I won't be accused unjustly.

HUGH PARRY: Sit down, Moses Roberts. Nobody's accusing you.

MOSES ROBERTS (*pointing at UNCLE ELIAS*): *He's* accusing me.

[*But he sits down, nevertheless.*]

CAPTAIN HUGHES *sits on the bench.*

AHOLIBAH: I didn't hear a word.

JOHN ROBERTS (*up L.*): Stop your noise and loud talking with a corpse in the room. Have you no respect?

MOSES ROBERTS (*to MRS. MORRIS*): For why are you looking at me like that?

MRS. MORRIS: Just thinking I am.

[*She eyes him steadily.*]

UNCLE ELIAS (*chanting again*): Ah, Mrs. Morris the Bakery, shame on you for a wicked woman! Didn't you ask Isaiah Jones into your house three nights last week, and poor Aholibah there thinking he was at the works on night shift?

[*AHOLIBAH rises and rapidly registers surprise, suspicion and rage.*]

HUGH PARRY (*in a low voice*): Take no notice, Aholibah Jones.

MISS PUGH BACH (*with a laugh*): Night shift, indeed!

AHOLIBAH (*between her teeth*): If I thought there was a word of truth in it, Jennie Morris, I'd take that broom to you this minute.

MRS. MORRIS (*scornfully*): What are you talking about? I didn't hear a word.

CAPTAIN HUGHES (*in a loud whisper*): Are you going to let him laugh you into quarrelling?

AHOLIBAH (*to MRS. MORRIS*): I knew there was somebody, but I never thought he'd sink as low as you.

MRS. MORRIS (*calmly but loudly*): Keep your insulting tongue for yourself and your own kind, Aholibah Jones. I wouldn't let your rat of a husband come within a stone's throw of my garden gate if it were daylight and he bathed his body first, which God knows none of the Joneses have done since the Fall of Jericho.

AHOLIBAH (*wildly*): Jericho! Jericho! You should know Jericho well, Jennie Morris, for wasn't it Rahab the harlot, yes indeed, that caused the fall of it?

[*MRS. MORRIS rises.*]

MISS PUGH BACH: No. It was God.

AHOLIBAH (*turning on her with Welsh joy for a Biblical argument*): It was Rahab.

CAPTAIN HUGHES (*angrily*): What does it matter who it was?

AHOLIBAH: Of course it was Rahab.

MRS. MORRIS: There's stupid you are, Aholibah Jones, to be coming here with a purpose in mind and to be letting any little lie turn you from it.

MOSES ROBERTS: You did the same yourself. It was a lie he said about me, and think of the look you gave me.

MRS. MORRIS: I had good reason, Moses Roberts, for I thought it was you all along.

MISS PUGH BACH (*insistently*): It was God.

UNCLE ELIAS (*arguments are temporarily silenced while he speaks*): Ah, but these are nothing to the evil wrought against the whole community by Captain Hughes.

[*He has the whole of their attention.*]

AHOLIBAH (*with satisfaction*): Ah, now we're hearing something.

CAPTAIN HUGHES: Take no notice! Take no notice!

MOSES ROBERTS: Indeed we will. You don't get left out of this.

[*They all listen eagerly.*]

CAPTAIN HUGHES (*rising and going L. C.*): All fools you are, spoiling everything like this.

UNCLE ELIAS: Are you not ashamed, Captain Hughes, of the way you let the good people of the village give their poor savings for the burial of your wife when it's ninety-five pounds you have in the bank in Caernarvon?

HUGH PARRY (*on his feet*): Ninety-five pounds!

AHOLIBAH (*triumphantly*): I knew it.

[*They are all standing now.*]

MISS PUGH BACH: Well, the old rascal, isn't it?

MOSES ROBERTS: And you took our hard-earned money and us calling you Captain out of kindness because we thought you were a poor man. Why, only a stoker you were.



CAPTAIN HUGHES: Will you believe that schemer when he's making fools of us all?

MRS. MORRIS: I'm thinking there's some truth in this. A new carpet you bought last spring for the best parlour.

AHOLIBAH: Yes indeed, thick it was you couldn't hear yourself walk on it.

CAPTAIN HUGHES: Do I have to have ninety-five pounds in the bank for that?

MISS PUGH BACH: Ah, but it's true all the same. And we buried your poor wife. God help her, maybe you starved her to death and you with a fortune in the bank in Caernarvon.

MOSES ROBERTS: For shame, Captain Hughes, for shame!

CAPTAIN HUGHES (*turning on him furiously*): If you believe it, you're a thief yourself, for didn't you steal from Mrs. Morris's shop?

MOSES ROBERTS: Now did I, Mrs. Morris? Tell them once and for all I didn't.

MRS. MORRIS (*with asperity*): I'll search your house before I'll say you didn't.

CAPTAIN HUGHES (*delightedly*): Ah, there you are! A thief! A thief!

JOHN ROBERTS: That doesn't say you didn't rob us of all our savings.

MOSES ROBERTS (*to Mrs. Morris*): And what about you? Stealing other people's husbands when they say they're out working. You at your age!

MRS. MORRIS: You can't prove it.

MOSES ROBERTS (*the Welsh imagination beginning to function in a big way*): I can, too. I saw you.

MRS. MORRIS: You're a liar. You did not.

MOSES ROBERTS: I saw you and Isaiah Jones together three times last week.

AHOLIBAH: There you are. He's proved it.

MISS PUGH BACH: He hasn't. He's a liar himself and a thief, too. (*Drawing on her own imagination*) Didn't I see him with

my own eyes take the pound of butter and slip the postcards into his pocket ?

MRS. MORRIS : Why didn't you tell me before ?

MOSES ROBERTS : She does it herself every Saturday. I've seen her.

MISS PUGH BACH (*outraged*) : I never have.

CAPTAIN HUGHES (*not willing to be left out*) : You do, too. I've seen you.

MISS PUGH BACH (*screaming with temper*) : Who are you to prove anything when you've robbed the whole village with a mean and wicked trick ?

TWO OF THEM : Yes indeed. He robbed us all.

HUGH PARRY : Let's make him pay for it.

CAPTAIN HUGHES : A fine one you are to talk, when you open all our letters and read them, Hugh Parry the Post.

SEVERAL (*eagerly*) : Yes, indeed.

JOHN ROBERTS : That's it. And takes the money my brother William sends from London to keep his poor old mother.

CAPTAIN HUGHES (*turning upon him in a flash*) : And what do you do for your poor old mother, you good-for-nothing, you. Never a job of work you've done in your life.

SEVERAL : That's it.

MISS PUGH BACH : No, hanging around the pub is all you do.

MRS. MORRIS : Everyone knows it was you brought on Priscilla Owen's trouble.

AHOLIBAH : Satan finds some evil work for idle hands to do.

JOHN ROBERTS : He doesn't have to find it for you, you she-dragon. It's as much as he can do to keep up with you.

HUGH PARRY : Yes indeed. That's true.

ALL : Yes, indeed.

[*They all leap into the conflict. During all this HANNAH has been practically out of sight, making tea at the fireplace.*]

HANNAH (*coming forward*) : The tea's all soaked and ready.

[*She appears from her corner with a large pot of tea and goes to the table L.*]

AHOLIBAH: Do you think I'd drink one drop of tea with the likes of them?

[HANNAH returns towards the fireplace.

MRS. MORRIS: We'd never ask you to.

MISS PUGH BACH: No indeed.

UNCLE ELIAS (*handing the key to HANNAH*): Unlock the door now, Hannah. We wouldn't want to be keeping them against their will.

MOSES ROBERTS: Against our will, indeed! And you locking me in when I wanted to go home and feed my pigs.

[HANNAH takes the key, crosses up L., and unlocks the door.

CAPTAIN HUGHES: Well, this is nice company indeed. I'm off for home.

[He strides out.

MOSES ROBERTS (*going after him*): Follow him. Don't let him out of our sight. Ninety-five pounds in a bank in Caernarvon.

[He goes.

MRS. MORRIS (*following*): And eight and sixpence out of my till in the bakery, Moses Roberts. The pound of butter I wouldn't touch if you offered me two for it.

[She goes out after him.

AHOLIBAH (*on her heels*): And you just wait until I've had a talk with Isaiah. I won't let this rest, let me tell you.

[She also goes. HUGH PARRY, JOHN ROBERTS and MISS PUGH BACH crowd out after her, all talking at the same time, though fragments of speech stand out.

HUGH PARRY (*on his way up L.*): Thieves and liars, all of you! I never opened a letter in my life, or I'd have known, John Roberts, of the wrong you did to poor Priscilla Owen bach.

[He is gone.

JOHN ROBERTS (*at the door*): Didn't I say it was foolish to come here at all, and haven't you proved what I said was true, for I might have gone on thinking, Hugh Parry, to my dying day that you were an honest man?

[These last lines are said off.

MISS PUGH BACH (*after some preliminary chattering*): Ah, the wickedness there is to be found in a God-fearing village the size of this, isn't it? (*She has limped to the door without her stick and now turns to find it.*) To think of Captain Hughes with a fortune in Caernarvon and letting the poor people pay for the burial of his wife. (*Picking up her stick and talking at* UNCLE ELIAS) She's dead now and I won't be saying anything against her, but she was an idiot, yes indeed, to marry that wicked brute of a man. . . .

[*She trails out.*]

(*Off*) . . . and let him starve or poison her to death, for I'm sure that's what he did.

[*The noise of their talking dies away. HANNAH stands watching them. Then, with a little cry, she runs to UNCLE ELIAS and kisses him.*]

HANNAH: *Dadi bach*, you're the cleverest man in the world and I'm proud of you.

UNCLE ELIAS (*patting her head*): A cup of tea now, Hannah. A tiring afternoon I've had.

HANNAH: Yes, *dadi*.

[*She pours out the tea and gives him a cup.*]

UNCLE ELIAS (*after a moment's silence, sipping tea*): Well indeed, the baseness of human nature, isn't it? They God-fearing and chapel-going people taking advantage of a poor cripple like me.

HANNAH (*pouring tea for herself*): For shame, *dadi bach*, and you after taking advantage of them for years.

UNCLE ELIAS: Hannah, let me see that five shillings again.

HANNAH (*producing the money*): Could we be having sausages for supper to-night?

UNCLE ELIAS: Sausages and a bit of bacon if you like.

[*There is a knock on the door.*]

HANNAH: Come in!

[*MISS PUGH BACH enters and limps across to UNCLE ELIAS.*]

UNCLE ELIAS (*kindly, but with a hint of his professional manner*): Well, Miss Pugh bach, is there anything I can do for you?

MISS PUGH BACH: I was left behind going down the hill because I'm lame. I got to thinking, so I turned back. Oh, I'm so ashamed. I didn't mean to join with the others. Will you take me back?

UNCLE ELIAS: Sit on that stool. Close your eyes. Put your hands on your head and sing, quite loud, "Cuckoo, cuckoo," thirty-seven times.

[HANNAH gets the stool. MISS PUGH BACH obeys. UNCLE ELIAS finishes his tea and hands the cup to HANNAH. He arranges himself comfortably in bed, grins proudly at HANNAH with a nod at MISS PUGH BACH, and presently speaks.

Pass me my book!

[HANNAH picks it up for him. They both watch the woeful penitent.

MISS PUGH BACH (*feebly*): Cuckoo . . . cuckoo . . . cuckoo . . . cuckoo . . .

[*She goes on and on, as the CURTAIN FALLS.*



J. J. Bell

THREAD O' SCARLET

*A Play*

TO FRANK V. MORLEY

CHARACTERS

MIGSWORTH	}	Village tradesmen
SMITH		
BUTTERS		

LANDLORD OF INN

BREEN — an odd-job man

A TRAVELLER

SCENE: *Smoke-room of a small village inn, some eight miles from the county town. Low ceiling. Broad window with screens L. Fire R., ruddy embers. Door opening on passage at back. Barely furnished. Several small tables with their complements of chairs. Crude old-fashioned oleographs on walls. Bell-rope at side of fire-place. An evening in February, about twenty minutes from closing-time. A bitter wind is blowing outside, coming in squalls, with blatters of sleet against the window.*

MIGSWORTH, SMITH and BUTTERS are seated at a table, tankards before them. MIGSWORTH, who fancies himself a bit superior intellectually, and SMITH, a genial, rather stupid person, are interested in what is passing at back. BUTTERS appears sunk in his own thoughts; he is a big, heavy man; throughout the play he has a semi-dazed look. The door is open; THE LANDLORD is standing in the entrance as if to block it, and BREEN is seen in the passage beyond.

LANDLORD (*in tone of finality*): No, Mr. Breen, I can't serve ye, and my advice to you is to go home, and to bed !

BREEN: Haven't I told ye, ye'll get the money in the mornin' ?

LANDLORD: Quite so. But that's not my point. I've got a licence to lose. In other words——

BREEN: Come on, gimme a bottle o' whisky !

LANDLORD: No ! Ye've had enough.

BREEN: Damn ye !

[*Goes out. His footfalls are heard going down passage, steadily, and then the slam of the front-door. THE LANDLORD, wiping his brow, comes into the room.*]

MIGSWORTH: Quite right, Mr. Flett. He's had more'n enough.

SMITH: Queer, though, how steady he walks ! Don't he, Butters ?

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Applications for permission to perform this play should be made to Pinker's Play Bureau, Talbot House, Arundel Street, Strand, London, W.C.2.

The play is published by Messrs. Gowans & Gray, Ltd., at 1s. net, and may be obtained from Messrs. Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2.

BUTTERS (*as one awakening*): Who? Oh, Breen! I'm sick o' Breen. Never out o' my shop spyin' around and tryin' to get somethin' for nothin'. Was there to-night when I was closin'. Had to turn him out.

[*Relapses.*]

LANDLORD: 'Tis his head, not his legs, that takes it all. To tell the truth, gentlemen, I'm afraid—not of, but *for* him. Trade's rotten bad, the Lord knows, but I swear I'd sooner be without Breen's custom. He's been hard at it for a solid month, and gettin' worse every day. Can't think when or where he earns the money.—But you rang, gentlemen.

MIGSWORTH (*with a wave towards tankards*): Same again, please.

[LANDLORD *makes to collect tankards.*]

BUTTERS (*as if waking*): No more for me. Must be goin' home.

MIGSWORTH: Tut! ye need another. We all do, after what we've gone through to-day.

[BUTTERS *lets his tankard go.*]

And mind ye, Mr. Flett, I don't wonder at Breen goin' it hard after all *he's* gone through—lost his only friend. Both shiftless chaps, but——

LANDLORD: True, true, Mr. Migsworth. Still, I prefer to see a man drownin' his sorrows in moderation.

[*Goes out with tankards.*]

MIGSWORTH: Ah, what a day! Longest I've ever known.

SMITH: Not so long as last night must ha' been to Jacob Forge.

BUTTERS (*without raising his head*): Last night—oh, my soul!

[*His friends glance at him.*]

SMITH: Aye, ye must ha' felt it, Butters, havin' been on the jury. Always wondered why ye didn't get out o' that. I believe ye could. (*More cheerfully*) And yet, here's the three o' us, sittin' round this table for close on three hours, chattin' about 'most everything but the thing we're thinkin' on.

MIGSWORTH: Well, as two single men and a widower without offspring (*nods at BUTTERS*), 'twouldn't be natural to sit alone in our houses, dumb, and thinkin' o' Jacob Forge, our neighbour—that was. I couldn't do it.

SMITH (*in a burst of emotion*): Oh, oh, to think that at eight o'clock this blessed—I mean cursed—mornin' Jacob Forge was hanged by—by the neck until he was——

[BUTTERS *makes a fluttering gesture of protest.*

MIGSWORTH: 'Sh ! No need for to go into details, Mr. Smith. Forge has paid the penalty o' his crime, havin' been found guilty by a jury o' good men and true, includin' our friend and neighbour here, William Butters, who——

BUTTERS (*sitting up*): I must be gettin' home. 'Tis on my mind that I left the keys o' my safe on the counter and didn't lock up anything properly. Was too upset.

[*Half rises and subsides.*

MIGSWORTH: Don't you worry, Mr. Butters. Your property's all right. Aye, we may pity Jacob Forge, though none o' us liked him; but we know he had a fair trial and full justice. Not that I'd ever ha' dreamed o' him bein' a murd——

BUTTERS: Don't say it ! 'Tis too awful. Jacob was a strange man, and yet—— (*Pause.*) And, of course, we found him guilty because o' the evidence.

SMITH: Of course ! Because o' the evidence ! But, this mornin', when I see the black flag goin' up—they did hoist it slow !—I says to myself——

MIGSWORTH: Was *you* there ?

SMITH: Aye; I saw ye, too, all muffled up. 'Twas a cold mornin', though. Was muffled up myself. And you, Mr. Butters—I *thought* I saw ye, too.

BUTTERS (*bowing his head*): I went—to pray—to pray that the black flag—might never go up. Oh, my soul !

MIGSWORTH: Now, what do ye mean by that ?

[LANDLORD *enters. There is a short pause while he sets the tankards on the table.*

We're talkin' o' the melancholy episode o' this mornin', Mr. Flett.

[*Lays money on table.*



LANDLORD: Ah, yes, yes. Very shockin' to be sure, very shockin'. (*Taking money*) Thank 'ee, sir. I understood from his remarks that Mr. Breen had been there.

SMITH: What? Him?

MIGSWORTH: How could he?—his only friend bein' hanged!

LANDLORD: He was talkin' o' puttin' a knife in the judge that sentenced Forge—and poisonin' all the jury!

SMITH: That's awful! He must be goin' crazy.

MIGSWORTH (*sagely*): When a man takes to Scotch, he's done!

SMITH (*with an attempt at humour*): Beggin' your pardon—but judgin' from Mister Breen's case, I should say he's never done!

MIGSWORTH: Oh, very good, very good!

[*Laughs discreetly.*]

BUTTERS (*shuddering*): What if Breen is right?

MIGSWORTH: Right?

BUTTERS: About the judge. And what—what's to happen to the judge and jury, if we was all wrong?

LANDLORD (*puzzled*): What's all this, Mr. Butters?

[*BUTTERS relapses without response.*]

MIGSWORTH (*confidentially*): Nerves, Mr. Flett, just nerves.

LANDLORD: *I see, I see!* And I knows a little about 'em, too. Fact is, I'm a bit that way at the moment.

SMITH: How so? (*Eager to drink, nods to MIGSWORTH*) Good health!

[*Drinks.*]

LANDLORD: I've got a notion—a preminotion, if ye understand what I mean, gentlemen—that our unfortunate friend Breen'll come back to-night: and I don't like it.

MIGSWORTH: Ye'll have our support, Mr. Flett—our moral support—in refusin' him refreshment.

LANDLORD: Thank 'ee, sir, thank 'ee. I'm bound to refuse him. There's my conscience to be considered—

SMITH: *And* your licence. Besides, most likely he's got no money.

LANDLORD: True, Mr. Smith.

[*Goes out.*]

SMITH: Come away, Butters! This is real good beer—make ye sleep sound.

BUTTERS (*as if awakening*): I saw Breen there this mornin'. Our muffin's was nothin' to his. But I spied his face—my God, shall I ever forget his face when the flag was goin' up and——

SMITH (*eagerly*): What was it like?

MIGSWORTH: 'Sh! Mr. Smith. Supposed with grief, no doubt!

BUTTERS: 'Twas like a—a soul in torments.

MIGSWORTH: Seems to have some decent feelin's after all, though I *have* doubted it when seein' him sittin' there (*points towards corner*) night after night, drinkin' on his own. (*Drinks*) Shows how careful we should be in judgin' our neighbours.

SMITH (*after a long pull*): Ah, well, maybe there was more real friendship 'twixt him and Forge than we thought. They was both such terrible close chaps.

[*Motor horn is heard.*]

Hullo, goin' to stop here. (*Rises and goes to window.*) My! I don't envy any man his car on a night like this! Black as hell; sleet drivin' well-nigh level! Ugh! (*Shivers.*) Glad I haven't far to go.

[*Starts back from a vivid flare of lightning, which is followed quickly by a frightful thunder-clap.*]

BUTTERS, *with a cry, leaps and subsides trembling.*

MIGSWORTH (*with feigned coolness*): Bit unexpected at this season, wasn't it? Why, Mr. Butters, ye're lookin' sickish! No danger, ye know.

BUTTERS (*with emotion*): Oh, there's somethin' wrong in the world this night—some awful wickedness abroad—I'm feared to take the road now——

SMITH (*returning to table*): Come, come, this won't do at all! Take a good sup o' your beer. Give ye comfort. Ye should never ha' gone to the hangin' this mornin'.

BUTTERS (*still trembling*): I tell ye—in yon flash I saw Jacob Forge, and he was hung—hung on a scarlet thread.

[MIGSWORTH and SMITH look at each other.]

MIGSWORTH: Tut! Tut!

BUTTERS (*frantically*): Nothin' but a scarlet thread—and he was dead and starin' and his head all sideways—sorter smilin' to himself as if——

SMITH (*in a gasp*): Smilin'!

MIGSWORTH: Hush!

[Door opens. TRAVELLER enters, followed by LANDLORD.]

TRAVELLER (*impatiently as he removes dripping wraps*): Oh, this will do. Have a bedroom fired for me, and another for my man. But first let me have a double Scotch, some boiling water, sugar and lemon.

[Goes to fire and stands chafing his hands.]

LANDLORD: Yes, sir.

[Goes out.]

A pause, during which MIGSWORTH and SMITH glance at THE TRAVELLER and at each other. BUTTERS, chin on chest, takes no notice. There has been a lull in the storm, but now comes a blast of wind with a violent blatter of hail.

SMITH (*starting*): Lord, what's that?

MIGSWORTH: Only hail. The thunder's brought it down.

[Is about to address TRAVELLER.]

BUTTERS (*dreamily*): Hung by a scarlet thread and smilin'—smilin' the smile o' (*voice almost fails*) an innocent man——

SMITH (*under his breath*): Oh, I say!

MIGSWORTH (*leaning over and patting BUTTERS's shoulder*): Don't you worry about it, old man. (*Winking to SMITH*) I doubt he must ha' been loadin' up before he came here. (*Clears throat and addresses TRAVELLER*) Terrible night, sir.

TRAVELLER (*turning*): Horrible! (*Drily yet courteously*) I hope I am not intruding here. Only place with a fire going.

MIGSWORTH: Not at all, sir. 'Tis a public room, and, if 'twas private, ye'd be welcome on such a night.

TRAVELLER: Much obliged, I'm sure. (*Takes chair at hearth. Yawns. Produces case and selects a cigarette. Lights up while MIGSWORTH and SMITH watch him with interest.*) There's a village about here, isn't there?

MIGSWORTH: Two, sir. Lower Ashley and Upper Ashley. This inn is midway betwixt them.

TRAVELLER: If you reside here, perhaps you can tell me whether the population includes a person—a man—who is stone-deaf—possibly dumb also.

MIGSWORTH: Oh, no, sir.

SMITH (*hopefully*): But we've got a paralytic, sir.

TRAVELLER: H'm! This man was apparently bound for one of the Ashleys, and he gave my chauffeur and me the nerve-shock of our lives.

[LANDLORD *enters with tray; sets it on small table which he places conveniently for the traveller.*

MIGSWORTH (*respectfully*): How was that, sir?

TRAVELLER (*to LANDLORD*): Thanks. (*While he mixes toddy*) Well, in the midst of a blizzard, the lamps showed him walking in the middle of the road. We kept sounding the horn, but he paid no attention. We slowed and my man was going to risk the ditch, when the fellow stepped aside, and we carried on. Next moment he was back in the middle of the road.

[THE LANDLORD, *who has moved to the door, halts, listening.* It was the nearest thing! Of course we braked hard, but I swear the bonnet touched him when the car stopped with a jerk that, I thought, had finished her—and then the fellow walked on without so much as turning his head.

[*Sips toddy.*

MIGSWORTH: My gracious! did ever one hear the like o' that? What did ye do, sir?

TRAVELLER: Shouted on him to stop, but he paid no attention. I think he must have left the road soon after, for when we got going again—the car had suffered, you

understand—there was no sign of him. (*Savagely*) I'd like very much to get a word with him !

MIGSWORTH: Sounds like a lunatic, sir. And ye never saw his face ?

TRAVELLER: Nothing but his back. (*Sips.*) A biggish man, in a long tarpaulin coat and a soft felt hat.

SMITH: Plenty o' tarpaulins and soft felts—old ones—hereabouts.

TRAVELLER: He had a heavy muffler coming above the coat-collar as if to shield the back of his head. I noted it in the lamp-light—a scarlet muffler——

[SMITH *starts as if shot.*

MIGSWORTH (*in a screech*): A what !!!

LANDLORD (*clutching edge of door, mutters*): A scarlet muffler !

[*Slowly BUTTERS comes out of a dream.*

TRAVELLER: Yes. Odd taste, no doubt, but so it was—I say, what's the matter with your friend ?

[*Indicates BUTTERS.*

MIGSWORTH: Kindly excuse him, sir ; he's had rather much.

BUTTERS (*muttering*): Hung on a scarlet thread, he was, and smilin'——

MIGSWORTH (*soothingly*): Come, come, old man !

BUTTERS (*as though not hearing, turns slowly to TRAVELLER and extends shaking forefinger*): 'Twas a ghost ye saw this night—the ghost o' Jacob Forge that was hung for murder this mornin' at Lakeford Jail. And he was hung on a thread o' that same scarlet muffler—God rest his soul !

[*Relapses into dream.*

TRAVELLER (*to MIGSWORTH*): I'm afraid all this is beyond me. Incidentally, I should say your friend is not suffering from any over-indulgence, but from some severe mental and nervous strain.

SMITH (*anticipating MIGSWORTH*): 'Tis like enough, sir. John Butters is a good man, and as honest as any grocer could be, in these hard times. Had his difficulties, he had. But he should never ha' gone to see the black flag hoisted



this mornin'. Ye see, sir, he had the ill-luck to be one o' the jury that sent Jacob Forge, our neighbour, though not our friend, to the gallows, and he's never got over it. Now he's started sayin' to himself: "What if me and the judge was wrong?"

TRAVELLER (*nodding sympathetically*): And this Jacob Forge—and the scarlet muffler?

SMITH: Why, sir——

MIGSWORTH (*interposing*): In the winter-time Jacob Forge always wore the scarlet muffler—he was well known by it, for there was nothin' like it in Ashley. And on a dark night, on the high road, he murdered an old farmer comin' home from market wi' a bag o' money—near four hundred pounds—beat in his head wi' a hammer, he did!

SMITH: I know that money-bag! Seen it often in my shop.

LANDLORD: Same here! Farmer Jukes never passed my door——

SMITH: And they found the hammer hid in Forge's tool-house wi' blood and a grey hair or two on it. And they found three cheques belongin' to the farmer there also; but the bag o' notes and cash they never found; he must ha' hid it too safe. And 'twas proved that he was needin' money at the time. We all was, for that matter. Of course at the trial he denied everything; said he was sleepin' in his bed when it happened.

MIGSWORTH: But it was the muffler did for him! Though there was other evidence. He must ha' hid it, too, or burned it, for 'twas never found—he swore he had lost it; thought he had dropped it in one o' the village-shops, but couldn't say which——

SMITH: But in the farmer's nails they got a thread of it. The old man would be clawin' at his enemy, ye understand. So 'tis true enough that Jacob Forge was hung on a thread o' scarlet.

LANDLORD (*taking a step forward and clearing his throat*): It should be told, sir, that, even after he was condemned, Forge always believed—or pretended he believed—that something would happen to save him. But (*shaking his head*)

the black flag went up, sure enough, this mornin' ! I didn't know Forge—he never came here—but I allow it has been a sorrowful day.

*[A clock is heard striking ten.]*

TRAVELLER: Bound to cast a gloom over the place. Was this Forge married ?

MIGSWORTH (*getting in first*): No, sir; and he had no friends exceptin' a chap called Breen—another solitudinarian like himself—who has unfortunately been tryin' to drown his grief ever since—as Mr. Flett there will confirm.

LANDLORD: Too true, sir, though I do my best to check him. (*Takes out watch; to the three.*) Well, gentlemen, I'm real sorry, but the law must be obeyed.

*[MIGSWORTH empties his tankard.]*

SMITH: Your clock's fast. Considerin' the day it's been, and considerin' the night it is—hark to that blast !—Mr. Migsworth and me ought to have one more. We'll take it standin' if ye like.

*[Empties his tankard.]*

LANDLORD (*holding up watch*): Correct time's here, gentlemen. Sorry, very sorry, indeed !

*[They rise reluctantly. MIGSWORTH is about to arouse BUTTERS.]*

TRAVELLER: Perhaps you gentlemen will give me your company for a little longer.

*[They smile delightedly.]*

Right ! Two pints, Landlord.

LANDLORD: Very good, sir. If ye'll excuse me, I'll lock up first.

*[Goes out.]*

SMITH: 'Tis too kind !

MIGSWORTH (*in his best manner*): I am deeply obliged.

*[They sit.]*

TRAVELLER: Not at all. But what about your friend ?

MIGSWORTH: Best not disturb him, sir. Mr. Smith and me will see him home in due season. He should never ha' been on the jury.

TRAVELLER (*lighting fresh cigarette*): What do you two gentlemen think about your friend's ghost theory?

MIGSWORTH: Well, sir, personally, I don't believe in ghosts as a general rule——

SMITH: Nor me——ever!

MIGSWORTH: All the same, I'd swear there's not a livin' man within twenty miles o' Ashley would wear a scarlet muffler now——

SMITH: Hadn't thought o' that. (*Suddenly, listening, holds up hand.*) I say, there's somebody comin' in.

[*Disturbance outside; altercation. LANDLORD's voice: "No, no, I can't have it. After ten, you know!"*]

MIGSWORTH: Oh, Lord! I do believe 'tis Breen come back.

TRAVELLER: Breen?—the friend of the murd—the dead man?

MIGSWORTH: Yes, sir; and I'm afraid it means trouble for Flett. Of course Flett *can't* serve him now.

[*Altercation sounds nearer. BREEN cursing; LANDLORD protesting or trying to soothe.*]

Oh, damn it all, he's comin' in! Hope he won't be unpleasant, sir.

LANDLORD (*outside*): Now, now, Mr. Breen, don't ye be unkind. Ye wouldn't like me to lose my licence. It's after hours, and if anyone saw ye comin' in—— Oh, why didn't I lock the door on the stroke?

BREEN (*outside*): Lemme pass! Fetch a bottle o' whisky. I've got the money. Hear that? All right, fetch it!

LANDLORD: Stop, stop, for the Lord's sake!

[*Sounds of a struggle.*]

Well, well, if I let ye in for a minute, will ye promise not to—— Oh, dear!

[*BREEN enters, flinging the door back on its hinges, followed by dismayed and dishevelled LANDLORD. He wears a tarpaulin coat buttoned to the chin and streaming wet. He is hatless. His face is dead white; his eyes fixed and staring. He walks in a steady, mechanical fashion to a chair in the corner, his usual place. Takes no notice of other occupants. Sits.*]

LANDLORD (*halting just inside door, apologetically*): Gentlemen, I couldn't stop him.

TRAVELLER (*under his breath*): Heavens, what a case!

[*Beckons LANDLORD.*]

BREEN (*staring at vacancy; in a sing-song voice*): A knife for the silly old judge and a bottle o' whisky for me!

[*LANDLORD comes on tiptoe.*]

TRAVELLER (*whispering*): Whatever happens, not a drop!

LANDLORD: Oh, never! (*Whispering*) But is he—is he drunk, sir?

TRAVELLER: Worse! He's on the verge of—never mind. Go back to the door. Wait. Be ready.

BREEN (*without moving*): Poison for the daft jury, and a bottle o' whisky for me!

[*THE TRAVELLER, gripping the arms of his chair, leans forward, alert, watchful. SMITH stares stupidly. BUTTERS seems to be coming out of his dream.*]

MIGSWORTH (*with a cough, behind his hand*): What about givin' him some strong coffee, sir?

[*TRAVELLER makes a sign for silence. All is still in the room; but outside the wind rises to a shriek, and a gust of hail strikes the window.*]

BREEN (*as before*): Bottle o' whisky——

[*BUTTERS realizes presence of BREEN and sits quietly, gazing. There comes a flash of lightning, a crackle of thunder. All start save BREEN. The wind falls with a sob. Silence.*]

BREEN (*as before*): Bottle o' whisky. (*Then his expression changes as though another idea has entered his brain.*) Money!—ye want money—! (*Like an automaton he stands up. The two lowest buttons of the tarpaulin are undone, and drawing aside the skirt he gets at a pocket. Withdraws his fist, stands rigid for a moment or two.*) Money! (*Flings handful of coins on the floor.*) Money!—Whisky!

[*No one stirs.*]

Not enough money? Eh? (*Goes to pocket again. Fetches forth good-sized canvas bag.*) Bottle o' whisky! (*Flings bag with a crash at LANDLORD's feet.*) There!



LANDLORD (*recoiling in horror*): Oh, my good God! The farmer's money-bag!

[SMITH, *clutching MIGSWORTH's arm, points at bag*. BUTTERS, *his eyes starting, rises slowly and stands grasping chair-back*. *His lips move soundlessly*.

BREEN (*his gaze fixed again*): Bottle o'—(*Pause*.) Bottle o'—(*Longer pause*.) Black flag—Black flag—Black—

[*Slowly his mouth opens and shuts like that of a gasping fish*.

TRAVELLER *rises softly, signalling to LANDLORD*.

*The gasping stops abruptly, the mouth remaining open*. BREEN *takes two mechanical steps forward*.

THE TRAVELLER *slips nearer*.

BREEN *rises on his toes*.

TRAVELLER (*to LANDLORD*): Quick!

[BREEN *pitches forward*. THE TRAVELLER and LANDLORD *catch him*.

Here!—in my chair. Get off his coat. (*Undoes coat, throws it open, exposing scarlet muffler round neck and across chest*.) Why, it's the man I nearly—

SMITH (*in a high falsetto*): Oh, oh, oh!—the farmer's money-bag—and the scarlet muffler, too!

[MIGSWORTH *puts his hands to his face*.

TRAVELLER: Quiet!

[*Lays his ear to BREEN's heart—a pause—lifts a grave countenance*.

*A silence*. MIGSWORTH *uncovers his face*.

BUTTERS (*staggers forward, one hand to his head, the other pointing shakily*): Breen, ye damned thief, ye've been burglin' my safe.

[*Realizes the significance of his words and stands petrified*.

*First the TRAVELLER, then MIGSWORTH, then SMITH and LANDLORD recoil from him*.

CURTAIN





Gordon Bottomley

EALAS AID

(SGEIR NA BHAN-TIGHEARNA: 1523)

*A Lyric Play*

TO AUSTIN CLARKE  
IN REGARD AND ADMIRATION

CHARACTERS

LADY EALAS Aid (pronounced YÁLASET)

MACLEAN OF DUART – her husband

ANGUS }  
COLL } Maclean's men

EACHAINN CAMPBELL, kinsman to Ealasaid

THE EARL OF ARGYLL, brother to Ealasaid

FOLLOWERS OF MACLEAN

FOLLOWERS OF ARGYLL

Chorus of Sea-Waves

Sub-Chorus of Sea-Swallows

[A CHORUS OF SEA-WAVES enters, dancing: it ranges itself across the front of an empty stage.

CHORUS:

Whither now do we go?

FIRST WAVE:

What do the waters know?

CHORUS:

We hear from our fellows, who flock away  
In landless light to falling day,  
Of wide bright spaces, of deep steep places  
Where under-wave the waters go down  
Beyond the floors that we have known—

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

The deep dim pavement of the tide  
In the crag-built channels where we abide:

CHORUS:

We hear that far and far and far  
Steep rearing curvetting waters are,  
Escaping earth, driving for ever,  
With no more islands to curb and sever  
Their masterful, power-gathering flow . . .

FIRST WAVE:

Not that do I know. What do we know?

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

There is a land—

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

Land dear to us!

FIRST SEMICHORUS: Where mountains stand—

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

Our hearts' tide flows  
Where those mountains stand, and still glens go,  
Thick with the land-weed whose name is trees,  
Between the heights—

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For permission to perform this play, application should be made to The League of British Dramatists, 87 Drayton Gardens, London, S.W.5, and in the U.S.A., to Messrs. Paul Reynolds and Son, 70 Fifth Avenue, New York City.

FIRST SEMICHORUS:                    Heights bare below  
Our sleeping, drifted sisters of snow  
That only the green-time, the Summer-time frees.

CHORUS:  
Down through pasture and moss the slow  
Snow slips hidden, creeps into our breasts  
Chill, chill, as the shiver that threads  
The heart like a warning when darkness comes.

SECOND SEMICHORUS:  
A warning?

FIRST SEMICHORUS: A fear lest a presence unseen—

SECOND SEMICHORUS:  
Or seen like the wind's when it enters the foam's—  
Comes from land and pauses between  
The land and the sand and the flow.

FIRST WAVE:  
Land has spirits we cannot know;  
Yet we are kindred with these coasts  
Of inland waters that rise and fall,  
Shut away in quietness,  
Wandering far from wild-winged hosts  
Of flying water that lift and press  
To the open tumult and stress.

CHORUS:  
Answering only a wind's call  
When it leaps upon us between the tops  
Of cloud-hung mountains, down ringing clefts  
Of uplifted crag—where a screaming bird  
Is caught and hurried like the high wind's froth  
Whither it would not, down on us swept—

FIRST SEMICHORUS:  
Till water-clogged wings and a head unreared  
Float breathless to a sidelong pool  
Where our whipped ridges spread.

SECOND SEMICHORUS:  
And the flutterless thing lies dead.



## FIRST WAVE:

These sheltering coasts are ours.  
 But the Isles of Bride, too,  
 Of streams and shadows full,  
 Claim our ministering powers:  
 Laving them ever we go  
 By sound and channel and flow,  
 Tidally rising, falling, changing,  
 Earth-current under moon-current ranging,  
 Ever moving and disturbed;  
 By an unseen power driven,  
 By an unseen power curbed;  
 Ever meeting and setting,  
 Herded athwart each riven  
 Sound and skerry and bay—

## SECOND SEMICHORUS:

Shepherded to-day  
 Along and athwart the mightiest Sound,  
 Where the lovely feet of Mull are bound  
 With the soft, stript lace of our fretting.

## CHORUS:

Island Mull, the crossing and weltering  
 Linn of Morvern, Linn of Lorn  
 Reach us, take us, sweep us torn,  
 Past Lismore and into your sheltering:

## FIRST SEMICHORUS:

Isle of fragrance and flashing rivers,  
 Isle of lights and of colours lighted  
 By spiritual breath that quivers  
 Flowing between your earth and air—  
 That earth's bright breath by distance sighted,  
 Low and lambent everywhere.

## CHORUS:

Fair; fair; O fair!  
 But here we are fretted by sharp skerries—  
 Here, there, everywhere—  
 That tear and tatter us, and maim  
 Rhythm that is life to water and flame!  
 Swing out where the main tide hurries  
 The stream whereout we came.

[The WAVES part, swing to the sides of the stage, and thence to the back. They reveal a small islet-rock in the centre of the stage. It is constructed in two pieces, a broad flattish base, and on that a tooth-shaped rock only large enough to afford an insecure foothold to two or three people. On this and the broader base are grouped a SUB-CHORUS OF WHITE SEA-SWALLOWS, not more than five in number, personated by slim young girls.

#### THE SEA-SWALLOWS:

The tide is turning;  
 The flow is changing;  
 In its hovering darkness the undertow  
 Poises, falters, sensing the churning  
 Of Coire Bhreachan afar and unheard—  
 Where the two tides clash estranged, estranging,  
 And the roots of the Isles tremble and know  
 Their immovable stone is stirred.

#### FIRST SEMICHORUS OF WAVES:

Slim white friends, like arrows alive  
 That shoot themselves and come again  
 To the hands of the archers of the wind,  
 Even the wandered waves must dive,  
 Twisting, stretching, choking, coiling,  
 Down that vacant hollow toiling  
 Into the waters' heart to find  
 That wild motion has no heart.  
 Swift white slim ones, even our breath  
 Could draw you into mortal pain  
 When we reach the outer main  
 And are hurried underneath  
 That fierceness, that death.

#### SECOND SEMICHORUS:

Never seek us, never follow  
 When we are called to that dread hollow.

#### THE SEA-SWALLOWS:

We fear no wave, we whiten the air  
 Beyond the reach of the tallest billow,  
 Beyond the spring and sting and urge  
 Of your angered surge.

## SECOND SEMICHORUS:

It is a wind that angers us '  
 When we forget to care  
 For you, white spirits seen clear—  
 A wind that blinds us when your fair  
 Thin panting shapes we toss  
 Because you dart and dare  
 The air among the flakes of foam  
 Torn from us by that harsh wind's comb.

## THE SEA-SWALLOWS:

We are tireless, we are light;  
 And none of your winds is now in flight.  
 Not to-night, not to-night  
 Shall your roughness shew us danger.  
 Look over the Sound: something stranger  
 Shall disturb us, send us flying  
 Before any wind or undertow  
 Can launch your leaping crests at us.

## FIRST WAVE:

Over the mile of waters lying,  
 Lipping, lipping from row to row,  
 Plashing, flashing, in Westering light—  
 Tidal water whose rising shews  
 Even our thin birds' foothold slight  
 Slowly lessens on the skerry—  
 Over these dark-veined waters voices  
 Come from Duart: a small boat's noises  
 Are clearly heard.

## THE SEA-SWALLOWS:

Clearly heard  
 By wave and bird.

## FIRST SEMICHORUS OF WAVES:

Dipped oars splash.

## SECOND SEMICHORUS:

Feathered oars flash.

[THE SEA-SWALLOWS *sweep out from their rock to the limits of the stage, stream to the front, then back to the rock with a suggestion of a low skimming flight close to the sea's surface.*

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

Feathered wings skim.

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

Our birds float out  
And almost swim.

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

At a boatman's shout  
The white wings turn  
In disorder and flurry.

A SEA-SWALLOW (*as they return*):

All is not well  
I tell.

SECOND SEA-SWALLOW:

And I tell.

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

Tell.

SECOND SEMICHORUS: Tell.

FIRST WAVE:

What do you tell?

Why did you turn and spurn  
Suddenly a boat we know,  
Battering wings in alarm,  
Ruffling at Lismore ferry?

THE SEA-SWALLOWS:

Sin and hovering harm  
Are driving that dark boat on.  
It is no ferry. It is foul and unsteady.  
It was never the boat of Duart's Lady,  
Of Argyll's sister, Maclean's wife:  
Yet Maclean's wife is in it alone  
With two rough men, who measure her life  
With the beats of their oars—and she does not hear  
What the steady oars said to her and us.

CHORUS OF WAVES:

Whatever comes, it is almost here.

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

It is near!

SECOND SEMICHORUS: It is nearer!

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

And ever more near.

This is the boat . . .

A MAN'S VOICE (COLL): Backwater !

SECOND SEMICHORUS: It slows.

It pauses. It comes. Why. . . . Why ?

THE SEA-SWALLOWS :

Sisters, this is a time for flight !

Up ! Up ! Hide in the night !

[THE SEA-SWALLOWS *sweep off the rock and out through the ranged WAVES.*

CHORUS :

Hush, you little ones : let us hear

Why the boat is passing near

The treacherous skerry. Daylight pales :

The heights are darkening. Now our veils

Of evening gather. No one hails

These silent people from Morvern's shore.

The men backwater. Why are they dour

To the passive woman ? Is she still for fear ?

They are out of the current : they come here !

[THE WAVES *sink backward and crouch in the rear of the stage, watching. Evening light deepens to twilight as the scene progresses.*

ANGUS MACLEAN, LADY EALASAIÐ MACLEAN and COLL MACLEAN *enter singly from the left, as though in a boat. The business of the boat's arrival may simply be mimed, ANGUS putting out a boat-hook to pull it in to the Skerry, COLL using an oar to push it in : or a symbolic boat of wicker may be used, as in the Japanese Nō.*

LADY EALASAIÐ :

Angus, what is this ?

[*A pause, with no answer.*

What are you doing, men ?

ANGUS (*surly and preoccupied*) : Landing.

LADY EALASAIÐ :

Then you are landing on the shore of sleep,

Being not awake yourself.

COLL : He is not landing himself.

LADY EALASAIÐ (*turning to COLL*) :

He is not ; but I am.



COLL:               You will be. It is what we were thinking.

LADY EALASAIÐ:

What ails you, men? Can you not see where you are?  
You take me to Port Kilcheran for the night:  
I know you were told.

ANGUS:               We were.

COLL:

You told us.

LADY EALASAIÐ: Will you look where you are?

You are out of your course: you are out of any course.  
Why was Duart giving you drink so often?  
Your sense is out. I am not safe. Push off—  
Push out to the channel: we shall be on the reef.

COLL:

You will.

LADY EALASAIÐ (*furious*):

Dog of my hearth, what do you mean?

COLL:

We are Duart's dogs, not yours: we do his bidding.

LADY EALASAIÐ:

What may his bidding be?

ANGUS:

His bidding was that we are not to hurt you  
In landing you on this Skerry.

LADY EALASAIÐ:

But . . . but . . . in three hours it will not be seen. . . .  
It is covered at high tide, and boatmen fear it. . . .  
You cannot leave me here. . . .

ANGUS:

Indeed, I have never been here at high tide:  
I cannot say . . .

COLL:

No; no—we cannot say.

LADY EALASAIÐ (*pulling rings from her fingers feverishly*):

You cannot do it: take my rings, my brooch.  
See, this was the King's gift: alone it shall pay  
More than Duart will pay the two of you.  
[*She divides the jewellery between them.*]

ANGUS:

I was thinking we would be better  
To be taking the rings from you, and not lose them.  
But this is less painful for you: you are sensible.  
We will have the earrings now before we land you.

LADY EALASAIÐ (*as he plucks one*):

Do not dare—you are tearing my ear. (*In pain*) O—  
stay!

Let me give you the other one—Wait, wait, wait!

ANGUS (*as he receives the second earring*):

Will you put your foot on the gunwale here—

LADY EALASAIÐ:

No.

ANGUS:

You will understand it has to be.

LADY EALASAIÐ:

No.

I will obey my husband, if he can say that:  
I will not obèy yòu.

ANGUS:

You will: or we need not keep our faith with him.

LADY EALASAIÐ (*scornfully*):

What is your faith like when you keep it?

ANGUS:

He asked

“What then do you intend to do with her?”

COLL:

“We shall send her away from Mull and home,” we  
said.

ANGUS:

Duart thought, and replied

“Whatever you do, take care that you do not hurt  
her.”

COLL:

“No, no; indeed not” we said:

“We will make on her body no mark, red or black;  
But go with us she shall, and out of this island.”

LADY EALASAIÐ:

No one will pity you when my brother comes,  
Hears of me and comes.

ANGUS:

Mhic Cailein Mhor has forgotten long ago  
That you are married on Duart:  
His black unfriendly deeds to Duart's men  
Are counting against you now: we do not fear him.

LADY EALASAIÐ:

Bring me to my husband—unless he will come to me.  
No man will drown his wife for a faithless brother.

ANGUS:

You will not see him again: we were plain with him,  
As his foster-brothers with the right to speak.  
He shall get another wife, who can give him an heir.  
He cannot do that while you are in the way.

LADY EALASAIÐ:

You have said that to my husband?  
He never answered you.

COLL:

He did not, indeed.

ANGUS:

Finish, Coll: take her shoulders.

COLL:

Wait you, Angus.

My wife told me not to be wasting her good clothes:  
Let me get them off her before we move her.

*[He rips open THE LADY'S bodice-buttons before she realizes what he is doing, and is tugging to strip the bodice from her shoulders: at the same instant ANGUS unfastens her waist-band and slips her skirt down to her feet.]*

ANGUS:

Indeed we should be foolish to be wetting them.

LADY EALASAIÐ (*beside herself, struggling and striking and shrieking*):

How dare you! How dare you! Help me! Help—  
O, help!

*[As they finish, she suddenly ceases struggling and stands up quite still and with dignity.]*

You are evil men. Will you listen to me?

*[ANGUS and COLL loose her and wait expectantly, COLL with bodice in hand.]*

What is to be, will be: I cannot guide it,  
 But still I will command myself in it.  
 You tell me nothing strange:  
 For lonely months I have known as much as you,  
 Except that I could not believe there were words to  
 express it.  
 I knew that Lauchlan Maclean had finished with me;  
 And that I have not finished with him. . . . Let God  
 help me.  
 If I were in Paradise and heard his voice  
 Across a darkness I would run to it.  
 If his blood were draining out of him, quietly, quickly,  
 I would put my own blood into him if I could.  
 What's to be done with the life he does not want?  
 It might as well serve him still as do anything else.  
 Keep your dirty hands off me: do not touch me:  
 I will do what he wants once more.

ANGUS (*eagerly*):

You need not hurt yourself  
 For lack of a steadying hand.

LADY EALASAIÐ (*savagely*):

Stand away from me, I say. . . .

[*Turning suddenly on COLL, who gives back in surprise.*

And you too!

[*She essays to step on to the rock, but her legs fail her and she  
 sinks into the bottom of the boat.*

I cannot do it—I cannot . . .

[*The last syllable is a sob, and she buries her face in her hands.*

ANGUS (*approaching her*):

Coll, we will make an end.

COLL (*similarly*):

Yes, yes. . . . Are you ready?

LADY EALASAIÐ (*starting up*):

Go back: you are not to touch me. . . .

[*She braces herself, taut and rigid, and forces herself to set  
 foot on the rock, where she stands, still rigid.*

Get hastily now to Duart, wicked ministers;  
 Tell him you have not hurt me—

[*With sudden energy.*

Yes, tell him it is not you who hurt me to-night.

ANGUS:

Coll, she has nothing on her but shirt and petticoat:  
If she's washed ashore at Duart he will know.

COLL (*gathering up her dress*):

He will not know what has become of her dress:  
He will not know the dress when he sees it again.

ANGUS (*pushing the boat off*):

But, Coll—

COLL: My wife is to have it.

She will meet me: I am not returning without it.

LADY EALASAIÐ (*mocking*):

It makes no difference: let him take it freely—  
And tell where he got it, too.

Mull may yet be proud there's a man at Duart  
Who once thought of his wife before himself.

ANGUS:

Your shirt is thin:

There's a fisherman's coat in this locker: put it on.

[*He throws a rough heavy garment ashore as the boat gets under way in nightfall.*]

LADY EALASAIÐ (*haughtily*):

It shall lie there—for someone to read your confession.

COLL (*as they disappear with the boat*):

What was she saying?

ANGUS:

Nothing.

LADY EALASAIÐ (*unmoving, louder*):

I am saying a prayer—it is

That neither of you may ever land anywhere. . . .

[*She waits a moment, then moves forward.*]

They cannot see me now. . . . No one can.

[*She kneels on the rock, and reaches for the coat lying at its base. She has to stretch, and almost overbalances before she can draw it to her: recovering herself, she clasps it to her as she sinks to a sitting, drooping position on the highest part of the rock. Only the woman and the rock are visible in the general darkness. THE WAVES commence to come forward stealthily from each side. She continues on a half sob.*]



I did not know I have so poor a spirit :  
 I allow myself to cry because no one can hear me.  
 This shall not be. No tears. I say " No tears."

*[She sits up rigidly: she is evidently swallowing continually.*

I have to watch this water creeping in :  
 Eyes, keep clear for that. . . . I know this coat,  
 I have felt it before. . . . I have had it in my arms,  
 I know it—although it is cold that once was warm. . . .  
 It was his; his——

*[She gives way, and drops her length on the stone, crying in noisy misery, uncontrollably.*

O, Lauchlan . . . Lauchlan . . . Lauchlan. . . .

*[THE WAVES have advanced, and now close in before her and hide her.*

CHORUS (*in a preoccupied muttering*) :

This is the hour when the seas divine  
 There is no division among them.  
 In the inner coves faint ripples twine  
 With the first least thrill that has strung them  
 From the outer stream to know  
 That the inspiriting flow  
 Wakes and moves and begins to grow  
 With a vital, possessive mastering sense  
 That its languor is over,  
 That its felt withdrawal and impotence  
 To reach and cover  
 The first green places, the first rock-traces,  
 Is braced and filled with longing and strung—  
 Lifting, spreading, flung  
 In surf-claw on surf-claw that stings and chases  
 Up, up the bank of the sea ;  
 And in the waveless quiet spaces  
 Rises and deepens on shoal and skerry,  
 Irresistibly gentle and without hurry,  
 Yet potent to mount, to sway and to bury  
 Earth's refuse and unwanted graces  
 (A draggled bird's, a still face's)  
 Imperceptibly.

THE SEA-SWALLOWS (*unseen*) :

This is the stone that is sometimes lost  
 Under water and not to be found.

When the draught of a tempest follows the Sound,  
 Catching us sidelong, and we are tossed  
 With baffled wings and claspings feet,  
 Steerless, we reach to this refuge lowly—  
 Driven here breathless, to wait and breathe;  
 Feeling our foothold vanishes slowly  
 Although the gale and the ground-swell sink. . . .

FIRST SEA-SWALLOW:

But what is this on its narrowing brink  
 That is here before us, yet has no wings?  
 That no alighting foot surprises?

THE SEA-SWALLOWS:

Is it wounded? Weakly it clings  
 And spreads where no one ever came—  
 And the water rises, the water rises,  
 Covering our stations: it is hurt: it is lame:

FIRST SEA-SWALLOW:

It is living, but tame. . . .

SECOND SEA-SWALLOW:

It is human, it is woman, it never cries;

THE SEA-SWALLOWS:

And the waters rise, the waters rise.

[THE WAVES *part and repeat their former movement, half to each side, then round to the back of the stage where they unite to re-align.*

*The base of the islet has disappeared, leaving only the tooth-shaped rock visible, as though the rest were submerged. THE LADY is embracing the rock, half-prostrate, wearing the man's coat: behind and above her, grouped solicitously, are THREE SEA-SWALLOWS only. Moonrise on the Sound touches them all.*

THE SEA-SWALLOWS (*continuing*):

Woman, O woman, listen to us:  
 Be alarmed!

We are woman-birds, it is piteous  
 To see you harmed.

We yearn as mothers, as daughters beseech—

We would protect you:

Sister, strive to divine our speech.

FIRST SEA-SWALLOW:

What has wrecked you ?

SECOND SEA-SWALLOW:

Flung hither and decked you

About your feet and this covering cloth

With the tidal wash, here fretted to froth ?

THIRD SEA-SWALLOW:

Lonely sister, why will you not hear us ?

You never shrink from us or fear us ;

Yet you will not understand

This is no human's land.

By the tide's will it is lost each day ;

By the tide's will it is lost each night ;

The tide will cover you if you stay.

THE SEA-SWALLOWS:

We are small, we cannot bear you away ;

We are too light to take you in flight.

Trust, trust the waters, or you are lost—

Swim with us as we seek the coast :

We will wait with you there for day.

LADY EALASAIÐ:

These wingy things might be

Spirits of bird and bird,

Trying to speak to me,

Urgent to be heard :

I believe I am pitying them

For their anxiousness—

For my inability

To understand why they came,

And the things I believe they say.

[THE SECOND SEA-SWALLOW, *the centre one, leaning over*  
LADY EALASAIÐ *from behind, and touching cheek with*  
*cheek.*

There is no help for you here.

We cannot help you.

Touch me and share my fear

That is all for you, that has felt you

Ignorant of fate coming.

Feel—O feel you will die !

Do you not understand ?

Lovelier than we are, and human ;

Pale, pale sister, why  
Will you believe this is land ?  
Come, leave its treachery.

LADY EALASAIÐ (*reaching up with one hand to caress her*):

Why do I feel assured  
I receive this white ghost's meaning ?  
In this feathery, warm clinging  
A throbbing brings us nearer  
And near: her intention is clearer,  
A sense of her enters me—  
As though her being were immured  
With wings spread inside my breast.  
They have a speech, these little things;  
And I am learning it.  
Their innocence cannot conceive  
I am already at rest,  
And that not all their wings  
Can help me to live.  
You believe I do not know my danger,  
Dear little ones: and I know.  
Stay with me: here with me sit,  
And you shall learn how the stranger  
Must stay, must go . . .

THE SEA-SWALLOWS (*in sudden alarm, swirling away from the rock in widening circles*):

What is here ? What is there ?  
One of our boatman-enemies  
Surely comes ! That dip and plash  
Is not the ripple of a running tide;  
Watch for the oar-drip's flash in air——

FIRST SEA-SWALLOW:

There !

SECOND SEA-SWALLOW:

There !

THIRD SEA-SWALLOW:

There !

THE SEA-SWALLOWS:

Up ! Up ! High and wide !  
Wide and high ! Wider and high !  
Sisters, it is time to fly.

*[They sweep out to the left.*

LADY EALASOID (*starting up, calling after them*):

What have I done ?

Whither are you gone ?

Why will you suddenly leave me alone ?

*[She recollects herself, and sinks down again in dejection.*

What am I saying ? My mind is going now.

But why should the birds throng round and almost  
caress me,

And then take fright ? What have I done at last ?

I began to believe they looked straight into my mind :

But even my mind was still while they were with me,

And my body certainly never stirred to alarm.

What shook their delicate poise ?

*[A boat containing a solitary man enters from the right,  
continuing its course until it draws up behind the rock.*

Ah ! They knew.

What, what are you ?

I have forgotten your face

If you are Duart's man.

And who could be so base

Except a Maclean of that house

To come now to this place

To see if the death-tide flows,

To end what Maclean began—

With a rope and a bag or a knife

If the death-tide is too slow.

[EACHAINN CAMPBELL, *out of breath, as though with over-exertion* :

Child of Cailein, are your reins

Weak of instinct not to know

That a child of Cailein strains

His heart's sinews here, now,

To come in time to you.

LADY EALASOID :

Who are you ?

EACHAINN :

Well, well you know, my Lady Ealasaid,

That Island Mull has long been wide enough

To hold two Campbells. I am the other one. . . .



LADY EALASÁID (*laughing in relief, yet as though a little light-headed*):

And I not to be knowing you, Eachainn, Eachainn. . . .

Perhaps my heart is broken: and something beside  
Torn, torn, sundered—the strings of the will,  
That bind life fast in the flesh.

I believe I was already out of the world

When I saw you: I thought you a stranger from some-  
where else.

Why have you come. Is this chance?

Is it chance: or were you meaning it? O, speak!

Did you know? Did you know?

EACHAINN:

One came to my house at Port nam Marbh after  
sunset. . . .

LADY EALASÁID:

Who? Who?

EACHAINN:

It is better not to know, my Lady.

LADY EALASÁID:

Speak, you.

EACHAINN:

I will not. I am under *geasa* as to his name.

He helped me down with a boat. . . .

LADY EALASÁID:

Although I am not to know him, I shall reward him.

And you who save me . . . I will give you Duart—

If you find it worth the taking when I have finished.

EACHAINN:

I had rather be given a house that was never Maclean's.

I need to remain in Mull.

LADY EALASÁID:

Maclean will not exist when my brother and I

Return to Inverara.

EACHAINN:

What will you do?

LADY EALASÁID (*intensely, quietly, in a felt stillness*):

I will do much more than lip-service to the God

Who said "Vengeance is mine: I will——"

EACHAINN:

Listen.

LADY EALASAIÐ (*reacting haughtily to the interruption*):  
To what?

EACHAINN:

Oars. I have heard them for some time.  
Now they turn this way. Let me help you aboard,  
And get you away at once.  
They come from Duart: they ought not to find you.

LADY EALASAIÐ: Wait.  
Lauchlan may be there.

EACHAINN:  
You cannot meet him yet, without your brother.

LADY EALASAIÐ:  
What should my brother do here?

EACHAINN:  
Save you when I am powerless.  
You do not know who comes.  
Get into my boat—and out of the moonlight: quickly.

LADY EALASAIÐ:  
But this may be my husband:  
I dare not go until I know who it is—  
And that it is not he.

EACHAINN:  
You dare not go? I dare not stay. Once more—  
And the last time, too—will you come?

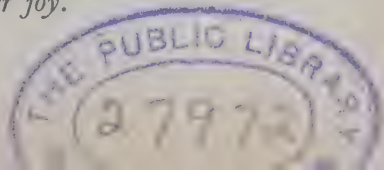
LADY EALASAIÐ:  
If this is my husband, I have not yet lost all:  
I shall lose all if I go, and this is he.

EACHAINN:  
Come, I beseech you . . .

LADY EALASAIÐ: Go.  
Why shall I live if this is not my husband?

EACHAINN:  
So be it. Farewell.  
[*He rows out to the right.*]

LADY EALASAIÐ (*looking out eagerly*):  
Come, boat, with whatever you bring.  
Row. Row. Row. I wish each oar were a wing.  
[MACLEAN OF DUART *rows in to the skerry from the left.*  
*Her voice rises almost to song in her joy.*]



Lauchlan ! Lauchlan ! Belovèd—I knew you would come.

MACLEAN :

Of course I meant to come :  
But do not sing about it—you will be heard.

LADY EALASAIÐ :

Why not ? We are together.

MACLEAN :

My foster-brothers believe I am in bed.  
Come quickly aboard : and be quiet.

LADY EALASAIÐ :

Let them all know

You are the chief. Are you not defying them ?  
Let them all hear that this is what love will do.

MACLEAN :

Hush you, hush you, I tell you—  
Until Isle Kerrera is between you and them.  
They are to find me in my bed in the morning :  
I cannot defy them all.  
If I put you ashore at Minard or Kilninver,  
You will be in Argyll again and safe from us all.

LADY EALASAIÐ :

Man of my love, why should I be safe from you ?

MACLEAN :

Because you shame me in my helplessness.  
I can stand against the clan no more. They are right :  
You are barren, you must go.  
Your brother is Mhic Cailein Mhor, and their dread.  
They have learnt by now I cannot make him their  
friend,  
Although he swears he is mine :  
And you do nothing for them.

LADY EALASAIÐ :

A woman cannot.

He says you were a sept of ours.

MACLEAN :

Never.

LADY EALASAIÐ :

Behave as though you are : that were enough.

MACLEAN :

Enough to end me.

LADY EALASAIÐ (*seating herself on the rock*):

So you end me instead.

Leave me now: the water is rising quickly.

MACLEAN:

I swear it was never my thought.

I had to be still and deceive you, to deceive others:

I am here now to tell you I did not mean it—

Yes, to take you to safety by risking my own.

LADY EALASAIÐ:

And put me from you. Whom will you set in my place?

MACLEAN:

I have not considered yet—

LADY EALASAIÐ:

But you will.

MACLEAN:

I must.

LADY EALASAIÐ:

You know her. Who is she? I ought to say "Which?"

MACLEAN:

There is no one—

LADY EALASAIÐ:

There is.

MACLEAN:

Very well: there shall be to-morrow.

If you will come with me now, I will take you to safety.

LADY EALASAIÐ:

Why should I come with you

If you are not my husband?

[*With sudden energy.*

It is true. You are not. Get you gone. I stay here.

There is only this room for me in all the earth.

MACLEAN:

You will not be so foolish.

LADY EALASAIÐ:

I know my folly:

I remain for love of you.

MACLEAN:

The tide is rising. . . . It is rising. . . .

LADY EALASAIÐ (*ironically*):

Do you tell me that, Maclean?

Will it be the reason why water is lifting my clothes?

MACLEAN:

I ask you to come with me.

LADY EALASaid (*scornfully*):

I ask you to stay with me—

To talk with me as long as possible.

There is a vault of the prison at Inverara

Where husbands and wives may speak their last  
together

When one of them is to die.

It would be the man, of course, at Inverara:

But I will say with him

“Stay with me as long as you can. Come close. Come  
closer.”

[*A harsh shattering laugh: then she is suddenly serious.*]

Maclean of Duart, dare you not love me still?

MACLEAN:

I ask you to come away.

LADY EALASaid (*hopefully*): With you? (*He assents.*) Home?

MACLEAN:

To your home: yes.

LADY EALASaid: And your home?

MACLEAN: Never again.

LADY EALASaid (*slowly, bitterly*):

Then never again with you.

I am to die, Maclean: go you to a bride.

MACLEAN:

Ealasaid——

LADY EALASaid: Go.

[MACLEAN *turns his boat and rows away the way he came.*  
*When he is well away she continues:*

Eachainn, Eachainn Campbell, where are you?

EACHAINN (*appearing in his boat from the right again, out of the  
darkness*): Here.

What right have you to expect me?

LADY EALASaid: I knew you would wait.

EACHAINN (*still surly*):

Most men would have gone.



LADY EALASAIÐ: I felt you would wait till you knew.

EACHAINN:

Come into the water: I can get no further in.

LADY EALASAIÐ (*suddenly pitiful*):

O, Eachainn, help me: I am soaked right up to my waist.

My shoes fell off when I moved: my feet are swelling.

Dying is easier than living now:

I care little here about living—but . . . be kind, Eachainn.

EACHAINN (*going to her and bringing her into the boat*):

You are young enough to begin another life—

LADY EALASAIÐ (*trembling and chafing herself as she seats herself*):

Yes . . . Yes, Eachainn. . . . What are you doing with me?

EACHAINN (*touching the gunwale, then looking at his hand*):

Blood? . . . Are you hurt?

LADY EALASAIÐ:

My feet are cut.

EACHAINN (*taking off his plaid and wrapping her feet in it*):

Keep them warm till we land: the tide is against us,

We shall take the rest of the night.

LADY EALASAIÐ:

Give me an oar.

EACHAINN: You will use no oar of mine: you are done, woman.

Can you not feel it?

LADY EALASAIÐ:

What will you do with me?

EACHAINN:

I will bring you to my people at Lochnell:

They can find you a horse.

LADY EALASAIÐ:

My brother will reward you.

EACHAINN:

What I have done was not for Mhic Cailein Mhor,

But for the pride of the name we share with him.

LADY EALASAIÐ:

And not at all for me, Eachainn?

EACHAINN (*laughing*):

O, not at all. . . .

No, no; not at all. . . . It would not be—how could it?

(*Then gravely*)

But I would not have left you there :  
Not though all the men in Mull had guarded you.

[*As he speaks, he pushes off the boat, then rows out to the right again.*

*As soon as the stage is empty the FIRST SEA-SWALLOW enters with a low skimming motion, circles about the diminished rock, then perches on it.*

FIRST SEA-SWALLOW :

Heart of the night, have you gone ?  
No night had such meaning before.  
A streak of moonlight has shone  
On a pool  
Where the full  
Flood curls on the vanished shore ;  
And that lambent arrow of air  
Had a spirit's texture to sway  
And slant with the moon on its way,  
Like a spirit there.

But no thin core of light  
From an alien far-off place  
Is intimate with night  
And can trace  
The space  
Of night's shapely spirit in being  
As the darkling woman we found.  
Moonlight aided our seeing,  
Moonlight made pallid the Sound ;  
But we knew the human thing  
Wafted there  
Without any feather or wing.  
She was dark in the night, more  
Dark than the night, a core  
Of care,  
Sitting there,  
Intense with her darkness, the stone  
Ripened in the dark fruit night :  
She was human, yet alone,  
She did not drive us to flight.  
She was throned on the vanishing ground,

She had not our fear of the Sound.  
Waves, Waves, is she drowned ?

[THE WAVES, *coming forward from each side, close in to  
hide THE SEA-SWALLOW and the skerry.*

THE WAVES:

What do the waters know ?  
No more than they daily sing.  
The alien burdens we bring,  
The drift we move here, there,  
Are worthless, or perishing treasure :  
We have no knowledge or measure  
Of the burdens of men who fare  
Here, there, upon us, and go  
And come ; curse us and pray to us—  
And we never know why :  
And if they come to our arms they die,  
We never know why. We never know where  
They go when they say to us  
“ It is over now : cover us deeper.”  
What cares the bed for the sleeper ?  
We are waves, that lift and swing ;  
And when we are lifted up we sing.

THE FIRST WAVE :

Day by day by day by day  
We throng into the Sound : we steal away.  
Day by day men count our tides ;  
But the flood that leaps and the flood that glides,  
The ebbs that glide and the ebbs that leap  
Are the same to us who never sleep :  
They have no number, as we have none :  
This is the instant when we began.  
But the mortals have so little time  
They are thrifty about it : they count each chime  
Of our risen crests : they watch and believe  
In beginning and ending : they tremble and grieve  
When the counting and measuring grow high.  
They forget they count infinity ;  
And the lowest number is eternity.

Count, then, with them in days and weeks.  
Mute months go by : and some one seeks

The woman who crouched on the minishing skerry  
 For the sea that would not loiter or hurry  
 To cover and hide and forget. But who  
 Would go down to her bed and uncover her now?

THE WAVES:

And who dare watch him and wait to know  
 What is to come of it; what is to do?

[THE WAVES *part again, and move down each side and to the back of the stage. The rock is seen as at first, with the base that is only visible at low tide. Full mellow afternoon light. A boat containing MACLEAN OF DUART and half a dozen followers is in front of it to the left.*

FIRST MAN:

And are we here by Mhic Cailein Mhor's command?

ALL (*with the deep sound of a distant explosion*):

We are not.

MACLEAN:

The command is mine.

SECOND MAN:

And how will that be?

We know what has happened here. . . . Does Argyll  
 know?

THIRD MAN:

No one knows but ourselves: we have told no one.

SECOND MAN:

One of us is false.

OTHERS:

No.—No.—No.

SECOND MAN:

False.

No one knows this fang

Except ourselves, whose boats it has threatened for  
 years.

FOURTH MAN:

People are calling it The Sgeir Of The Woman. . . .

SECOND MAN:

What people?

FOURTH MAN:

Strangers.

FIFTH MAN:

Kerrera men.

SECOND MAN:

And who

Has told Mhic Cailein Mhor? Kerrera men.

FIRST MAN:

He is not told: it is his arrogance  
That will not come to Duart,  
And appoints a meeting-place that no man holds.

MACLEAN:

He was told his sister was drowned  
In crossing to Kilcheran too late at night.  
He asked the place of her death:  
He was told she was not found. I believe he looks  
To this as a half-way place where he can mourn her.

SECOND MAN (*grimly*):

He knows what he seeks.

MACLEAN:

I cannot believe he knows.

SECOND MAN:

And cannot you fear it?

Argyll does nothing without a meaning.

THE OTHERS (*like a deep rumble under-sea*): Ay.

MACLEAN:

You are all safe. Suspicion lies on me.  
Do I not know it? And are you not all true?  
Which of you is the false one?

THIRD MAN:

Where are Angus and Coll?

MACLEAN:

They are at Dromore

Near the Mull of Galloway.

SECOND MAN:

Why?

MACLEAN:

By my sending.

Argyll may question you all. They are better away:  
I know they would lie well, and faithfully,  
But no one ever foresees what a lie may tell.  
The rest of you are here to tell the truth.

FIRST MAN (*laughing*):

Not all the truth?

MACLEAN:

You do not know it. Tell

Your ignorance: serve Angus and Coll—and me.

SECOND MAN:

Whose galley comes from the Wester Sound and Tiree?



MACLEAN (*shading his eyes with his hands*):

It is Mhic Cailein Mhor.

I looked for him to come the other way.

What will this mean: do you see more craft than one?

My eyes are stinging me: I cannot count.

SECOND MAN:

It is alone.

MACLEAN: Surely there are two?

SECOND MAN:

One—and enough. (*Irritably*) Why are we hushed and still?

Laugh or brawl or cheer: let them hear you, I say.

[THE OTHERS *laugh, but the laugh tails off to nothing.*

THIRD MAN:

I can think of nothing to say.

FIRST MAN:

I can think of nothing

To say.

FOURTH MAN: I can think of nothing to say.

FIRST MAN:

Nothing.

MACLEAN:

If you are uneasy, be still. That tells them least.

[ARGYLL's galley enters, with men rowing. THE EARL OF ARGYLL stands in the prow: beside him is a man, holding in his arms a child in swaddling clothes.

ARGYLL:

What stillness is upon you, men of Duart?

Awe seems to overcome you: what have you seen?

Are your eyes stricken by a light in the West

Shewing you all that is no longer here,

And setting you hurriedly searching among your hearts

To learn if others are seeing all you see—

That is no longer here?

I looked for a greeting from you, brother.

MACLEAN:

I greet you.

I greet you, Mhic Cailein Mhor.

ARGYLL:

Nothing more, brother?

MACLEAN:

What do you ask?

ARGYLL: To share your grief, and so  
To lighten it, brother. Is not the burden great?

MACLEAN (*warily*):

Help me to understand.

ARGYLL:

I will help you. Yes.

Is this the Linn of Lorn, where my sister was  
drowned?

MACLEAN:

We do not know. We believe——

ARGYLL:

Where are the men who were with her?

MACLEAN:

They are not here.

ARGYLL:

Shall I not speak with one of them?

MACLEAN:

But where?

Where, where will you speak with either? Both are lost.  
We have not seen them again.

ARGYLL:

And my sister, also, is lost? Are they together?  
Have you not heard that someone has found your wife?

MACLEAN:

You call me brother, but you play with me.

ARGYLL:

I am in earnest, Lauchlan. Some time ago  
My sister told me you required an heir.  
I bring you one now: is it welcome?  
Bethink you, Lauchlan: had it not better be welcomed?  
I have brought it for you. (*Putting his hand on the child*)  
This is it.

MACLEAN:

What has a child of yours to do with me?  
How shall it become my heir? By your will?

ARGYLL:

By its birth, Lauchlan, its birth.  
Was I telling you that my sister's body is found?

Or did I forget to say so ?  
 When it was brought to me, nobody knew  
 It was with child : but it was.  
 This child has come from it.  
 The waif has had no time  
 To be anyone's child but yours. If you accept it,  
 Many things may be easier for its father.

[During ARGYLL's speech a smaller boat has emerged from behind his galley, rowed by one man, and carrying a woman dressed and veiled to tone with the colour of the curtains or back-cloth at the rear of the stage. She lands on the rock, seats herself on the upper part and is motionless : the boat passes on and out of sight. Nothing of this has been seen by MACLEAN or his men, their backs being to the rock as they speak with ARGYLL.]

MACLEAN :

Nothing will be easy for such a father—  
 Or such a child. Where is its mother to-day ?  
 Shew her to us : shew how you are cheating us :  
 I shall know then what to say.

ARGYLL :

You have the courage to ask for my sister's body ?

MACLEAN :

I said its mother.

ARGYLL : I said my sister.

MACLEAN :

The dead

Have never risen in childbirth.

ARGYLL (*suddenly hard*) :

She is risen.

She is risen, Maclean : the sea gave up its dead—  
 And this is your Last Judgment.

MACLEAN :

What do you mean ?

Where is she now ?

ARGYLL :

In the place of your wickedness.

[MACLEAN and his men involuntarily turn to the rock : some of the men shriek at sight of the woman, as all flinch.]

I see you know what I mean.

Your men know too : and I ? I know all that was done.

MACLEAN :

My men were not here.

ARGYLL: But you were.

You betray yourself again.

MACLEAN: I was alone.

My men were not here: you have nothing to do with them.

ARGYLL:

You believe me suddenly: why?

Will you not uncover her face—and see how I cheat you?

Or is she a spirit, that only her guilty see?

MACLEAN:

I shall not touch her. Do as you will with me.

ARGYLL:

You dare not touch her.

MACLEAN:

I?

ARGYLL:

You. You only dared it when no one could prove it.

MACLEAN (*stepping on to the rock, removing the woman's veil—and looking into his wife's face*):

Ealasaid, I am not to defend myself.

You know enough to defend me at least a little;

Tell him as much as you know.

ARGYLL (*abruptly and in a commanding voice*): Men of Duart,

Your chief says you were not in this. Go home.

SECOND MAN:

Not without him.

FIRST MAN:

Let him go.

THIRD MAN:

Give him to us; or we strike our best for him.

ARGYLL (*ironically*):

How often can you strike?

SECOND MAN:

Until we are all down.

ARGYLL:

Speak you to them, Maclean.

MACLEAN:

What shall I say?

ARGYLL:

Say what you will.

LADY EALAS Aid (*leaning forward and touching MACLEAN's arm timidly from behind*): Say what is to be said.

MACLEAN:

Men of my blood, I have to think of you,  
And a shameful thing in which you have no part.  
Let us say Farewell, if that is needed now:  
Duart has its heir, and all is well.  
You are to be clear of this. Hear me. You must.

FOURTH MAN:

Why should we?

MACLEAN:

Because your chief may be a child  
Whose part you will have to take against its father,  
For its mother's sake——

LADY EALAS Aid:

Lauchlan!

SECOND MAN:

We would take the child;

But no one gives it to us.

ARGYLL:

I bring it to Duart.

MACLEAN:

That is enough. Go now.

I believe that Mhic Cailein Mhor will bring me too.

FIFTH MAN:

Let him look to that—or we rise before the tide.  
Farewell, Maclean.

THE OTHERS (*with a significant pause in the word*): Farewell.

SECOND MAN (*turning in departing*):

Great man of Loch Fyne, see you to his faring.

[*The Duart boat and its crew go out to the left.*]

ARGYLL (*watching them out*):

Come, Elizabeth, come: why do you linger?  
Do you forget already your part in this?  
Come you aboard at once.

LADY EALAS Aid:

If you have anything to say to me  
I will only listen to the name I was born with,  
And not to the affected English name put on me  
When I went to Edinburgh.

ARGYLL (*in annoyance*):

It is you and not your name I am speaking to:  
Come here and leave him; now.



LADY EALASaid:

We come together, or not at all.

ARGYLL:

No.

LADY EALASaid:

If you leave him here his people will know before  
nightfall:

They will retrieve him: bad blood will strengthen  
again,

And I shall suffer their feeling again.

ARGYLL:

No.

Maclean, is your wife to drown after all?

MACLEAN:

She is not.

Come you and take her away.

I am ill at ease in my mind, and cannot talk to her.

I had rather drown than speak.

I have nothing to say to her.

LADY EALASaid (*tenderly*):

Nothing, Lauchlan?

MACLEAN (*seating himself despondently*):

No, no; nothing. I was miserable

When I believed you were drowned—but not so  
miserable

As I am now while you are watching me,

And waiting to hear what I say.

I beg you to disown me and go to your baby:

You are hearing my voice and watching what I will do;

And I fill with shame.

I wish I could not see you, Ealasaid.

LADY EALASaid:

O, Lauchlan, how unkind—and all the time

You stir the feeling I had when I first saw you,

A longing to be with you every day.

MACLEAN (*shyly, incredulously*):

Every day, Ealasaid?

LADY EALASaid:

Every day.

Will you not come and touch the child, for a blessing?

And share it for the blessing that joins us at last?

MACLEAN:

But will you never tell him, Ealasaid?

LADY EALASAIÐ:

Him? How did you know?

MACLEAN:

It could not have been a lassie. Not yet—not yet. . . .

ARGYLL:

Forgiveness is always a folly, Elizabeth:

Waiting upon it here is a double folly.

Bring him on board at once:

Though we may pardon, you have a sterner brother

Who will not hear the word.

You are his master now, as long as you wish it:

You can rid yourself of him when you are ready,

With this tale to his name.

LADY EALASAIÐ (*gravely*):

That is all a man ever knows.

The power in such things comes by silence about them.

Lauchlan, I am ready: take me from here,

And help me to forget the place.

MACLEAN:

Indeed,

You will never seek Port Kilcheran and forget.

LADY EALASAIÐ:

You shall row me to Kilcheran

Until I do not remember.

MACLEAN (*lifting her and carrying her in his arms to ARGYLL's galley*):

Let us get this over: it is not for a man

To shrink from the eyes of men:

But I long for my own again, to look in their eyes.

[THE WAVES come down the sides of the stage, and turn to meet in front.]

LADY EALASAIÐ (*holding out her hands as he follows her over the gunwale*):

You long for your own? You have her. This is she.

But, Lauchlan, tell me true:

Who is the woman you meant to put in my bed?

[He is in her arms, with the gunwale between them, as she says this. The two streams of WAVES close in and hide them, and only a peal of light, delicate laughter from her is heard.]

## THE WAVES:

The tide turns: the deeps  
 Rise in pressure under us:  
 Our suddenly tenser limbs  
 Must strike harder. They sunder us  
 As up the hollow steeps  
 We go—one here, one there—  
 And long hair spreads and swims  
 Everywhere,  
 Floated off in foam,  
 Flicking the flecks of its whips,  
 Till the high crest plunges home,  
 Turns under itself and dips,  
 Diving through chillness;  
 And a new crest curves its comb  
 To the streaming tresses, and slips  
 In and under and home again, home  
 In the dark stillness.

*[All THE SEA-SWALLOWS emerge between THE WAVES,  
 and play a hovering game of follow-my-leader in behind them  
 and out again.]*

## THE SEA-SWALLOWS:

The tide is rising,  
 The foam is as white  
 As we, as we;  
 Its flight is slight  
 As a flash of a wing.  
 We plunge and fling,  
 Our shapes disguising  
 With films like sails  
 From wings to tails,  
 Until no one can see  
 Which of us goes,  
 The foam or we.

The tide is full  
 The tide is high;  
 The hidden skerry  
 Is no more dry,  
 It is fierce, it tears  
 The sea that swirls

And bubbles with pearls  
Where its stone claws lie.  
They are fierce, they pierce  
That bubbled flurry:  
The sea's too cool,  
And too far down  
Have our perches gone—  
Let us fly, fly, fly.

[THE SEA-SWALLOWS *disappear, their game ending with their chorus.*

#### THE WAVES:

At the brim of the earth we poise and pause:  
The tide has risen, power withdraws  
From our limbs. It filled us, held us high  
A moment ago: soon we shall lie  
Languid, still, letting the waters  
Sink with us down and down; until  
They are threaded with power again and spill  
Once more at the barren earth's brim.  
And man? He still comes and goes and quarters  
The seas and the tides;  
But nowhere abides.  
Where man has been he may always come;  
But garrulous waves to him are dumb,  
And waves without memories still forget  
The passions, the agonies, the fret  
Of human tides that leave no mark  
As ours do at the brim, but go  
To the inconceivable past, soon dim  
And then for ever dark.

[*They withdraw: the rock is then seen to have disappeared.*

THE END

James Bridie

THE AMAZED EVANGELIST

*A Nightmare*



TO NEIL M. GUNN

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

MRS. SNELL

WILL

AGGIE

JOHN BARTHOLOMEW

THE REV. LACHLAN MACLACHLAN

ANNIE FRASER

*This play was first produced by MR. HENRY OSCAR at THE WESTMINSTER THEATRE on December 12th, 1932, with the following cast:*

<i>Will</i>	—	—	—	—	—	JOHN RAE
<i>Aggie</i>	—	—	—	—	—	ANNE WILSON
<i>Annie</i>	—	—	—	—	—	PEGGY MORTON
<i>Mrs. Snell</i>	—	—	—	—	—	FRANCES ROSS CAMPBELL
<i>John Bartholomew</i>	—	—	—	—	—	RICHARD AINLEY
<i>The Rev Lachlan MacLachlan</i>	—	—	—	—	—	WALDO WRIGHT

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SCENE: *Exterior of a lonely cottage a mile or so from a Clyde summer resort. The time is summer. The weather is fine. The cottage is small and dirty. Three bedraggled Scots firs stand by it. Two of them are tall and one short. A rickety iron garden seat is in front of the cottage. A rock or two and some whins are its only other amenities.*

*After the audience have had time to take in this picture, a hen is driven out of the cottage door and, one hopes, disappears into the wings. After a decent pause ANNIE, a rather blowsy young dairymaid, appears leading in WILL and AGGIE, who are on holiday. They are recently married, and have opened a shop in Pollokshaws on capital furnished by ANNIE's parents. WILL carries a suitcase.*

ANNIE: That's the place.

WILL: Oh, that's the place, is it?

ANNIE: That's what I said.

WILL: Well, it's not much of a place.

AGGIE: 'Deed, and it is not.

ANNIE: Well, it's not my business. It's not my place. And if you don't like the place you can away back to Dunoon and see if you can find any place better. You asked me for a place, and there's a place. And if you think I've no more to do on a nice afternoon like what this is than to stand hawering about the good points and the bad points of this place, or of any other place, I may tell you to your face that I nothing-of-the-sort will. And you can put that in your pipe and smoke it. And I think it's real decent of me to come all this way with folk I never saw before in all my born days to show them a place, and whether they're content with the place when they see it is no concern of mine, I can tell you. Can you imagine that, taking a lassie a good half-mile out of her way to show them a place, and when they get there, never a "Thank you" for your trouble, but "This isna right," and "That isna right," and "It's not what we're accustomed to in Glasgow," and so on and so forth!

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WILL: Ach ! what's biting you ! It's laryngitis you will be in bed with before long. What's the name of the place ?

ANNIE: What would it be doing with a name, a wee place like that ? It's Mrs. Snell's place.

WILL: Mrs. Snell ?

ANNIE: Didn't you not hear me when I said " Mrs. Snell " ? A body would think I had nothing to do but to stand here saying all things twice over for the likes of a wheen Glasgow keelies that doesn't understand the English language.

AGGIE: See here, my lady——

WILL: Ach ! never heed her, Aggie. She'll be off again. She's worse nor a gramataphone.

AGGIE: I will so heed her, Will. See here, my lady, we don't expect politeness from country folk, but I'll have less of the Glasgow keelie out of your head. My man and me asked you civilly if there was any lodgings, and you said there was, and here you drag us miles and miles on a hot summer's day, and this is what you show us at the hinder end of it ! It's us that should be flying out at you, not you that should be flying out on us.

ANNIE: And look you here, too——

WILL: Now, now, now. Aggie, I'm sure the house'll do fine.

AGGIE: It'll nothing of the sort do fine. What kind of a home does she think we come out of ?

ANNIE: Ay, that's just it. You'd wonder.

WILL: Ach ! we're on holiday. Forbye, there's not a hen-house to sleep in in Dunoon, and I'm not for carrying this flaking bag one other flaking step. You're sure the wife'll take lodgers ?

ANNIE: Ay, she'll take lodgers. What for else do you think I took you up yon hill and me going the other way all thegither ? What for do you think I would waste my time leading about a wheen of Glasgow keelies——

AGGIE: See here, I'll not have that expression from you or from anybody. You said——

WILL: Aggie, Aggie, I'm sure we're much obliged to the young lady for her trouble.

AGGIE: Oh, we're obliged, right enough. Can you imagine the like of a rickle of stones the like of that? I wouldna keep a pig in a place the like of that.

ANNIE: Ay, I think you'd be real nice to a pig if you had one. It would be a kind of companion to you, like.

AGGIE: I never saw an ill-tongued besom like you in all my travels, neither I did. Did you hear what she said, Will?

WILL: Ach! if you want to spend the whole Fair chewing the fat, I'll away hame. Will the wife be in, think you?

ANNIE: Ay, she'll be in. She isna muckle abroad these days. She's a queer one, Mrs. Snell.

AGGIE: Ay, so I'd think.

ANNIE: She's maybe queerer than you think, mistress. And I'll wish you a good day.

[Exit ANNIE.]

WILL: Hey, miss! She's away.

AGGIE: Thank God for that. She's demented, yon one. That's what she is—demented.

WILL: Ach! you've kind of rubbed her up the wrong way, I'm thinking. Losh, what a funny-like joint!

AGGIE: Come on away back to Dunoon.

WILL: What way?

AGGIE: This place gives me a funny feel up and down my spine.

WILL: It'll be something you picked up on the boat.

AGGIE: No, Will. It's something orra, like Boris Karloff in the pictures. I would not could stay here.

WILL: See here, Aggie. Your spine's nothing to my spine. I've humpit this heavy bag round Dunoon and a mile and a half up a brae, and I'm not going to hump it down again. See, you watch the bag and I'll go and chap on the door.

AGGIE: See and not chap over hard, or you'll bring the house down.

WILL: I'll mind. But, mind you, there is something orra about this place.

AGGIE: Are you feeling it, too?

WILL: It's they funny-like trees, I'm thinking. I think we'll go to Rothesay next Fair.

AGGIE: It'll be a gey queer place when the moon's out.

WILL: Ach ! away, you and your moon. (*He knocks at the door.*) I don't think there's a'boday in. We'll just have to away back.

AGGIE: It's funny there should be naeboday in. Yon lassie said she was aye in.

WILL: Ach ! yon lassie would say anything if you gie'd her time and she kept her health.

[*MRS. SNELL's face appears at a window.*]

MRS. SNELL: What's your will ?

WILL: Are you Mrs. Snell ?

MRS. SNELL: I'm Mrs. Snell, my laddie. What's your will ?

WILL: Do you take lodgers, Mrs. Snell ?

MRS. SNELL: Wha telled you I took lodgers ?

WILL: It was a ginger-headed lassie we met down-by.

MRS. SNELL: Ginger-headed ? Wha would that be, now ? Had she a heid of hair like bullock's blood, or a heid of hair like a copper pan, or a heid of hair like red sandstone rock, or a heid of hair like all hell's flames ?

WILL: She has a heid like all hell's flames, I'm thinking.

MRS. SNELL: And a tongue that went " Gurr, gurr " like the lowe of the Pit ?

WILL: Ay, she had a fair flow of conversation.

MRS. SNELL: And an e'e like a kestrel ?

WILL: I didna notice her e'e.

AGGIE: She has an e'e like an ill-tempered parrot.

MRS. SNELL: That would be Annie Fraser. She's a fine lassie, Annie. Bide a wee till I open the door.

[*She vanishes.*]

AGGIE: Oh, Will, come on away ! Come on away, Will.

WILL: Ach ! don't be daft. She'll not eat you.

AGGIE: Will she not ! She's a dial on her like an old cannibal.



WILL : Wheesht, now ! She'll be here in a minute.

AGGIE : Oh, Will !

[MRS. SNELL *comes out*.

MRS. SNELL : Sit you down on the seat there and take a look at the garden. I wasna expecting you. I maun redd up the hoose a wee. It's a but and ben. (*She takes up the bag.*) Ay, it's a fine bag. They haud a lot, they bags. Sit you down on the seat and content ye, the twae o' ye. Sit down when I tell you.

[*She carries the bag into the house.*

*Enter MR. LACHLAN MACLACHLAN. He is blasted with antiquity, wears a long white beard, and, apart from a clerical soft hat, is dressed like a gamekeeper. He speaks like an educated Scotsman with a very slight Highland accent.*

LACHLAN : Good-day to you.

WILL : Good-day.

LACHLAN : It has been a fine afternoon, and is drawing on to be a fine evening. I think the rain will be keeping away for a wee little now.

WILL : Sure and I hope so.

LACHLAN : It is very good to be hopeful. Very good indeed. It did nobody any harm at any time to hope. You will be resting yourselves for a little ?

WILL : Well, I think we're stopping here, but I'm not right sure.

LACHLAN : Dear me, dear me. You are stopping with Mrs. Snell. Well, well. I need not ask you have you been stopping long with Mrs. Snell. I need not ask. I need not ask.

AGGIE : We werena very sure of the place, mister. Was there anything against the lodgings ?

LACHLAN : Ah, there is and there isn't ! She is a worthy enough woman in her way is Mrs. Snell. A worthy woman. It would not befit me to say a single word against her.

WILL : You'll be well acquaint with her, like ?

LACHLAN (*sitting down*) : Yes and no. There was a time I was a minister of the Gospel, and she was in my parish. It was

long ago, long ago. I don't think it'll be often the young nyaff that succeeded me will be seeing her at the kirk now; however, great changes, great changes. It's thirty years since I gave up my charge. I still walk my fifteen miles a day. How old would you say I was, now?

AGGIE: You'll be well on for seventy.

LACHLAN: I am a hundred and three.

WILL: Do you tell me that?

LACHLAN: I tell you that. Ay, ay. It is a great age. I feel I'll be on the shelf soon. The Lord has blessed me bountifully with his loving kindness. Practically all of those who have done me little wrongs in their time are in their coffins. Practically all. It's an uplifting thought. The Lord has been very good. You are from Glasgow?

WILL: Ay, from the 'Shaws.

LACHLAN: And whom do you sit under in Glasgow, my lad?

WILL: I don't right follow you, sir.

LACHLAN: Of what body are you an adherent?

WILL: I aye support the Rangers, but I'm not bigoted, if you understand.

LACHLAN: I was asking at which church you were in the habit of worshipping?

WILL: Me? Oh, Aggie goes to the kirk whiles. But no' me. It's a lot of blethers, yon. I've enough to do in my shop all the week round. I'm that done on the Sabbath I just stay in my bed and read a good murder.

LACHLAN: You have no use for the ordinances of public worship?

WILL: No. Honest, I hiv not. I'm a thinking man, you see. You'll be a bit old-fashioned yourself, being a hundred and three, but I aye think the world's moving on. There's the wireless, d'ye see, and economics, and Einstein's theory. And there's the Quantum. You'll have heard tell of it, the Quantum? I'll not say I right understand it, but I believe in the Quantum.

LACHLAN: Ah! That's something, anyhow.

WILL: To tell you the real, honest truth, in Glasgow we leave religion to the Irish and get on with the job.

LACHLAN: Then you don't believe that there are more things than are dreamt of in your philosophy?

WILL: I'm not such a fool. They're finding something new every day.

LACHLAN: And you, madam, rest content with your husband's state of heathendom?

AGGIE: Ach! Will's all right. He's got a heid on him, has Will. Now, don't you go and start him on religion. He'll argle-bargle till past tea-time. I've nothing against religion myself, and I aye switch on the wireless for the Epilogue, but I like the bands better, I must say.

LACHLAN (*getting up*): Well, now, I have long rested from my labours, and the Lord will not expect me now to turn your minds to things of the Spirit. But I will say this one thing to you. You are doing a strange thing to shelter under the roof of Mysie Snell unfortified by religion. A strange thing, indeed. A dangerous thing.

AGGIE: See, now, what's the funny stuff? What's there against Mrs. Snell?

LACHLAN: There was a day when Mrs. Snell was a tall, lissom thing with hair like a crow's wing and a wild eye. That was before your four grandfathers were breeched. . . . Well, well, well. You are having a fine day for it, and I'll pray for you if I remember. But there's more and more things I don't remember. I'm beginning to think my memory's failing a little. Good day to you both, and God bless you.

WILL: Same to you, sir. Good day.

[LACHLAN *goes*.

He's a bug-hoose. That's what he is. Did you pipe the whiskers? A great saving in collars and cravats, yon. Ach! you couldna argue wi' a man like that. It's ower late for him to see reason. Geeze, it's turned awful cold. Yon old body, Mrs. Snell, takes a hell of a lot for granted, doesn't she no'? Awa' in with the bag before you could say "Kill the referee!" Come on in, Aggie, and we'll see what she's after. Jings, it's lonely here!

AGGIE: No. Wait till she comes out. It's a fine evening turning.

WILL: Ay, but it's cold.

AGGIE: Ugh, away. Sit close up. Listen; there's the band in the Castle Gardens.

WILL: You're a right wee warrior, Aggie.

[*They sit close. Silence. Re-enter MRS. SNELL.*]

MRS. SNELL: Eh, now, where's the need to jump apart like two nuts in a Hallowe'en fire? It's bonnie to see you, my wee plovers, cooing awa' the yin to the tither. Ye needna be feart I'll tell. You'll no' be long mairrit?

AGGIE: No. Will and me was married this May.

MRS. SNELL: May? You're no' feared to get mairrit in May?

AGGIE: Ach! what about it? It's old wives' clavers about May.

MRS. SNELL: When you ken a wee bit mair, lassie, you'll no' be so joco' about auld wives' clavers. There's things an auld wife kens. Ye'll not have been doon this way afore, now?

AGGIE: No, Mrs. Snell. It's gey bonnie here, Mrs. Snell.

MRS. SNELL: Ay, it's bonnie.

AGGIE: An awfy nice view.

MRS. SNELL: It's a view you'd hope to see the like of through the glaze of death creeping over your eyeballs.

AGGIE: Mercy me, Mrs. Snell!

MRS. SNELL: Ay, it's a fine situation for a bit hoosie.

[*Silence.*]

AGGIE: It's funny we were hearing the band from the Castle Gardens a minute ago. I canna hear it now.

MRS. SNELL: Ay, the wind's changed. It changes here whiles.

WILL: It's gey and cold.

MRS. SNELL: It's coming down off Argyle's Bowling Green.

WILL: What's Argyle's Bowling Green?

MRS. SNELL: It's yon row of hill-taps forenenst you.

WILL: Geeze! That's a funny-like bowling green.



MRS. SNELL: It's where auld MacCailen played at the bowls wi' YON YIN through a long midsummer night, and auld MacCailen lost.

WILL: Who's YON YIN?

MRS. SNELL: Whessht! He'll hear you.

WILL: Crivens, it's cauld! I think we'll away in, Mrs. Snell. And here! I forgot. What's your terms for the week?

MRS. SNELL: I havena just decided on the terms. But you'll be cosy enough in-by. Ay, cosy.

WILL: But I aye like to ken what I've got to pay. Forby, we don't know yet whether we'll like the place.

MRS. SNELL: You'll like the place. It's a braw place. The kettle's on the fire, and in a wee while I'll mask you a pot of tea. You'll bide here till I mask you a pot of tea.

WILL: But see here, mistress——

MRS. SNELL: I said you would bide here till I maskit you a pot of tea.

WILL: Oh, well——

MRS. SNELL: You was wedded in May, was you? It's a bonny month, is May, with the flourish on the thorn.

WILL: You'll be a native of these parts, mistress?

MRS. SNELL: No, I was born near by Paisley. My great-grannie was burnt at Paisley Cross.

WILL: That was awful. Would it be a tenement fire, like? Or was it the mills?

MRS. SNELL: She was burned by the Sheriff, on the evidence of ten ministers o' the Guggle-Gospel.

WILL: O' the what?

MRS. SNELL: I cannae rightly say it. Men of religion.

WILL: Oh, what way did they do an awful thing like that?

MRS. SNELL: She kenned ower muckle. . . . My grannie was a' jaggit over by the Witch-Finders. But they didna find the spot, clever as they were.

WILL: What spot?

MRS. SNELL: The wee white spot where YON YIN touched her wi' his finger.



AGGIE : Will !

MRS. SNELL : Never mind me, my hinny, my lamb. It's just auld wives' clavers. You wouldna lippen to auld wives' clavers ? I'll awa' in and see if the kettle's on the boil. And I've twa-three things to clear awa' frae the front of the fire that if ye saw ye'd be fearter still, my hinny. Auld wives' toys. Auld wives' toys.

[MRS. SNELL *goes into the cottage.*

AGGIE : Oh, Will, come on away ! Will, I'm feared !

WILL : Ach ! for God's sake shut your mouth ! What are you feared for ? She's just a daft old body. I'm feared I'll get the pneumonia with this bloody wind blawin' about my ribs.

AGGIE : Will, I cannae hear the band ; I cannae hear the band.

WILL : Well, it's the wind blowing from another airt. Forby, maybe the band's stopped for tea.

AGGIE : Oh, come on back among the folk.

WILL : Folk ! Ach, tae hell, I don't care if I never see folk any more. Coming down to the seaside for a holiday, and promenading up and down the street looking in the shop-windows ! Call that healthy ?

AGGIE : This place is not canny.

WILL : That's what you get in your kirks and your gospel halls. Just a pack of superstitions. It's yon old Sober Moses with the whiskers putting nonsense into your heid. I'm black affronted at you.

AGGIE : Oh, Will, here's somebody coming !

WILL : Well ! I thought you were ettling for folk.

AGGIE : But where did he come frae ? There was nobody on the road a minute syne.

WILL : Jings ! Yon wind's getting colder and colder.

AGGIE : It is that. It's an ill wind, that, Will. It'll not blow us any good. Come on away. I'll not bide here another minute. Let me go, do you hear me ?

WILL : Sit down, you daft besom !

[Enter JOHN BARTHOLOMEW. He is dressed in a blue tail-coat, of a century-old fashion, a stock, ruffles, black gloves, and a broad-brimmed black hat. There is little or nothing of the dandy about him. He looks like James Maxton at a fancy-dress ball.]

WILL: It's turning gay and cold, sir.

JOHN: It is cold. But it is colder where I come from. We have to keep the fire burning continually.

WILL: That'll be a fair expense.

JOHN: It is an expensive place. But don't let's talk of it. It isn't what it was. It bores me. It would bore you. I came to see the Cummer. Is the Cummer here?

WILL: No, this is Mrs. Snell's.

JOHN: Well, well—Mrs. Snell. Same thing. I gave her the by-name by mistake. Mrs. Snell. Is she here?

WILL: She is in the hoose.

JOHN: Ah! . . . She is an old nuisance. She bound the wind in three knots and loosened two. I was blown here. I couldn't help myself. It is a disgrace. No peace, no quiet. Will you tell her that John Bartholomew is here?

AGGIE: Will, don't leave me!

WILL: Ach! tae hell. What's biting you now? I'm fed-up with you, that's what I am. Fed-up.

[He enters the cottage.]

JOHN: Um. Ah. Yes. Mrs. Martin, isn't it? Aggie Yellowlees that was.

AGGIE: Yes.

JOHN: Let me see. Let me see. You have a wee brother Archie with a wart on his cheek, and you don't know what to do about that. And an idle slattern next door keeps making occasions to speak to your husband, Will, in the street, and you don't know what to do about that. Nor about your husband's mother's habit of dropping in for a cup of tea when you have the housework to do. You are born, Aggie Martin, to trouble, as the sparks fly upwards.

AGGIE: Who told you? How do you know all this about me?

JOHN: As a matter of fact, I am the Devil.

AGGIE: There's no such thing.

JOHN: Oh, I say, what absolute rot ! See here, listen ! I suppose you admit an eternal purposiveness, a majestic plan, or, if you go to the theatre, a life force. You will admit that this force is making for order, righteousness and perfection, and, further, that it has been here since life began on this planet. That is a long time ago, Aggie Martin. A long, long time ago. . . . And it seems longer. Such a long, long time it is, Aggie, that we should have had perfection long ago if there hadn't been a something. What is this something ? What is this reaction to eternal action, this drag on the wheel of progress ?

AGGIE: Oh, I don't know. Ask Will. He's the great one to argufy. I've no heid for that kind of thing.

JOHN: Then you mustn't say there's no such thing as a Devil, or anything else. There is any number of things, Aggie Martin, you have never seen or dreamed of; even greater than the number of things you have dreamed of but never seen. You have seen Donald the Duck, but there are thousands, nay, millions, living in darkness who have never seen or heard of him. Have these millions any right to say he does not exist ?

AGGIE: He's only a thing on a fillum.

JOHN: Don't interrupt with irrelevancies, please. Is Charlie Chaplin only a thing on a fillum, if it comes to that ? Or Greta Garbo ? Or Charles Laughton ? Or Clark Gable ? Or Shirley Temple ? Or even Bing Crosby ? . . . Am I only a thing in a book ? A book, by the way, you pretend to believe.

AGGIE: Ach ! my heid's fair bizzing ! Stop it, see ! You're about as like a devil as I am. You're daft, that's what you are.

[JOHN takes off his hat and shows a pair of small but indubitable horns.

AGGIE: Oh, mercy ! What a like thing !

JOHN (*putting on his hat again*): You wouldn't like to see me take off my boots ? You wouldn't like to see my tail ? Don't be silly.

AGGIE: What are you doing here ?

JOHN: That's what I'd very much like to know. Ah ! changed days. Changed days. It used to take a philosopher hours to draw his chalk circle and his seven-pointed star with the signs of the zodiac round it; and then he had to say the Magnificat backwards and the Words of Power before he could raise a teeny wee devil with goose's feet and a camel's head. Now a most unreasonable, half-cracked old lady can do it by simply untying a couple of knots. A devil can't call his soul his own.

AGGIE: I think I'm going to be sick.

JOHN (*eagerly*): Oh, I can put that right for you in a minute. Hold on for a second while I get—— Yes, yes, yes.

[*He scrabbles in the ground for some stones and places them in a certain pattern.*]

JOHN: Have patience. Let me see. Can I remember it ?

Wind through the gallows rattling the bones,  
Blow, blow on the nine wee stones,  
Four wee stones and five wee stones,  
Put it from the lassie into one wee stone,  
Into twa wee stones, into six wee stones,  
And into two mair, and there's one wee stone  
All alone, all alone.  
Tak' the croaking and the boaking,  
Tak' the fleeching and the reeching,  
And the deil gang wi' ye, a' the nine wee stones.

How do you feel now ?

AGGIE: Rotten.

JOHN: Dear me, I must have got it wrong. It's a pretty trick if it works properly. You're sure you're not all right ?

AGGIE: Oh, Will, Will !

JOHN: Do stop howling. I was enjoying our little chat. It's so nice to have a quiet, cosy chat with a nice girl. And, to do them justice, the witches in my department are far, far from that.

AGGIE (*faintly*): Witches ? Is Mrs. Snell a witch ?

JOHN: Of course she is, my dear.

AGGIE: And she'll be doing something awful to Will and me ?



JOHN: Oh, something perfectly beastly, I expect. She wouldn't have sent for me otherwise. She always means mischief when she sends for me. I often go home quite upset after our little séances. She has the most repulsive ideas, the Cummer.

AGGIE: Why do you call her the Cummer?

JOHN: That's her witch's name, you know. She's always called that on All Hallows Eve. At the Witches' Subscription Sabbath, you know. John Bartholomew's only my witch name, you know. I do wish I could tell you my other one. It would impress you frightfully.

AGGIE: But what will she do?

JOHN: Oh, I don't know. You haven't any babies, have you?

AGGIE: Oh, no.

JOHN: Not yet. She'd have probably wanted to eat them. I wish to goodness she would stick to distributing cattle fever. But they get so ambitious.

AGGIE: Oh!

JOHN: You startled me! What is it?

AGGIE: What's she doing to Will?

JOHN: I don't know. She can't do much without me, you know. So it's all right so far. I'll pop in and see, if you like. By the way, stay where you are. There's an invisible bale-fire round the cottage. If you wander a yard or so it'll bite you.

*[He goes into the cottage with a dancing step.]*

AGGIE (*more dead than alive*): Will, Will! Come to me.

*[Will comes out.]*

WILL: What's ado, Aggie?

AGGIE: Will! It's her—and him!

WILL: What's ado?

AGGIE: Will, we cannae get away! There's an invisible bale-fire round the cottage.

WILL (*after a few steps*): Well, there's something there, anyway. (*He sits down and lights a cigarette.*) This is a bonny-like business.



AGGIE: Oh, Will, it's devils !

WILL: There's no such thing as devils.

AGGIE: That's what I said. But there is. He took off his hat.

WILL: Ach ! your auntie ! This is the twentieth century. The march of science has advanced to such an extent——

AGGIE: Will, I've had all the argle-bargle I can thole.

WILL: Walker says——

AGGIE: Walker, whoever he is, canna mak' horns grow out of his heid and pit a bale-fire round a cottage. What's in that house ?

WILL: I was coming to that. It's a gey auld-farrant kind of a hoose.

AGGIE: What's in it ?

WILL: There's a wee shelf and a row o' wee wax images on it, and the creesh is in drops as if they'd been held in front of the fire. And there was pins stuck in them.

AGGIE: Pins ?

WILL: Wee black preens wi' mother-of-pearl heids.

AGGIE: What'll we dae ? What'll we dae ?

WILL: That's just what I was wondering.

AGGIE: I wish yon old man with the whiskers would come back.

WILL: What could he do ?

AGGIE: He'd save us from the devils and witches.

WILL: Tyach ! See here, Aggie. It's a' superstitious nonsense. It's a remnant of a darker age. The march of scientific thought . . .

AGGIE: I wish I had my Bible.

WILL: The Bible's a verra interesting collection of old Hebrew bawrs.

AGGIE: Or even a bit hymn-book.

WILL: Aggie, I'm black affrontit at you.

AGGIE: Well, what's that book sticking out of your pocket ? *The Backer's Guide* ? A lot of protection that'll be against devils.

WILL: It's nothing of the sort. *The Backer's Guide* ! It's a "True University Seeris."

AGGIE: What's it about ?

WILL: Well, I brought it down to read on the holiday. I dinna richt mind. . . . Yes. *A Popular Synopsis of the Views of the Neo-Mechanics*. Peter Mulvey lent me a loan of it.

AGGIE: Oh, Goad ! That's awful.

WILL: It's no' awful. If you would use your brains a wee bit more and your tongue a bit less. . . . List'n t' this. "Chapter Four. Why does a chicken cross a road——"

AGGIE: That's an auld yin. Tae get tae the other side.

WILL: Haud your tongue. Listen—"It crosses the road by virtue of a system of reflexes activated by certain physico-chemical phenomena. We are now able to measure with instruments of precision——"

AGGIE: Tyach ! I cannae make heid nor tail o' that.

WILL: You call yourself a thinking entity !

AGGIE: Oh ! Look, Will, look !

[MRS. SNELL *appears at the door*, JOHN BARTHOLOMEW *behind her*. *The stage darkens*.]

MRS. SNELL: Chookie, chookie, chookie ! Come into the hoose, my hens. Come in to dinner, my hens. You'll no' get tea, but I've made a suppie of broth for you. D'ye smell it ? D'ye smell it, my hens ?

WILL: Look ye here, mistress——

MRS. SNELL: The de'il harle ye through hell ! Would you cock your snout at me ? Ah, John ; John, my bonnie bawcock ! Ah, Hopdance, Cruchie, Pegs, Alabaster, Heigh-ma-Gourie, Skurly-wurly ! Nipperty, Bug, Halfneb, Nanks ! Do you hear me crying on them, you crookit-snooted wee cockymajinkie ? They'll be here, they'll be here ! Wait you !

AGGIE: Speak nice to her, Will. Speak nice.

WILL: Ach ! shut up ! Come on, the lot of you ! I'm a free and independent citizen. I'm an educated man. I've had evening classes. I've given a limelight lecture to the Clarion Scouts. You cannae touch me.

MRS. SNELL: Oh, John, my darling, my hinny, my jo—put it into his legs to do him harm: crack the hocks on him so they cannae haud him up.

[WILL *drops to his knees.*

AGGIE: See, you let him alane !

MRS. SNELL: Skurly-wurly, my bonnie wee bogle, spin the hissie—spin her like a peerie. Whup her roond, Nippety !

[AGGIE *begins to spin, slowly at first, and then rather faster.*

Spin into the hoose, my hinny, my hen. Spin into the kailpot, my juicy one ! The stuffin's ready. The skewer's ready. And John and me'll hae oor denner !

[WILL *opens his book.*

WILL (*in a loud voice*): " Chapter Four. Why does a chicken cross the road ? We are now able to measure with instruments of precision the physical and chemical changes resulting in the motion of a chicken in a given direction. We can trace anatomically the reflex paths which are engaged in the process. We know from the researches of——

[LACHLAN MACLACHLAN *appears, unnoticed by the rest.*

of Jakwez Low-ebb that given—and measurable—wavelengths of aetheric movement acting upon the rods and cones of the retina——"

[AGGIE *is spinning slowly, and, as it were, meditatively. The fiend and his mistress are looking puzzled.*

LACHLAN: Ah, but why does a policeman cross the road ?

[*There is a blinding flash. The stage is plunged in complete darkness. The windows of the cottage glow red for a moment, and then the glow fades. Thunder and wind are heard. The stage lights slowly.*

AGGIE, WILL, the bag and ANNIE FRASER *are seen in tableau as they were earlier in the play. All the others have disappeared. The distant band is heard.* ●

ANNIE: That's the place, Mrs. Snell's, it is.

AGGIE: Will, I don't think we'll stop here.

WILL: No, I don't kind o' like the look of it.

ANNIE: Please yoursel's. But you'll hae a job getting lodgings anywhere else this day.

WILL: Ach ! tae hell, then, we'll away back to Pollokshaws. It's a fine homely place, the 'Shaws. Are you coming, Aggie ?

AGGIE: It's a funny-like thing, to go richt awa' back home and waste the trip. Do you no' think it would be great sport just to try this place ?

WILL: I do not. Come on awa' hame. We'll listen to the band for a wee, and maybe have a bottle of kola and some whelks, and then we'll take the boat for Princes Pier. Holidays are not all they're cracked up to be.

ANNIE: Ach ! well, please yoursel's.

WILL: Come on, Aggie.

AGGIE: All right, Will. But I kind of wunner what it's like inside !

*[They go.]*

ANNIE: You cannae please some folk.

CURTAIN

Joe Corrie

NICODEMUS

*A Comedy*



## CHARACTERS

JONATHAN GREENWELL - a country joiner  
MATILDA GREENWELL - his wife  
NICODEMUS - - - their son  
EMMA HOLLYCOCK - a neighbour  
MR. GILES - - - the Vicar  
LUKE GREENWELL - Jonathan's father

THE SCENE is the living-room of Jonathan's cottage on the outskirts of the little village of Holly Rise.

The furniture is quite old, and the room has the appearance of being over-furnished. There is a good deal of curtain and lace material, and more flowers than is actually good for them or the occupants. But there is an excuse, for it is the wedding morn of their son, NICODEMUS.

As a play of this kind is better done in the dialect of the district where it is to be performed, so it is better to be furnished after the style of the district, too. Therefore this is left to the producer.

There are two doors in the room, one which leads to a passage and porch and one to a bedroom. The latter may be at the back of the left wall, and the former at the front of the right wall.

When the curtain rises, JONATHAN is struggling to get a stud through a stiff collar. He wears his very best clothes and doesn't seem at all comfortable in them. The boots he wears are only worn on special occasions, and it is quite evident that his corns aren't comfortable.

JONATHAN is the village joiner, a strong looking man of over fifty years, ruddy of face, with a small tuft of a beard. He is minus his coat.

MATILDA, who enters from outside as JONATHAN utters an exasperated "Damn!" is also wearing her very best black. She is a woman of about the same age as JONATHAN, but more refined-looking.

MATILDA: Do you want help with that stud, Jonathan?

JONATHAN: Well, it would be a bit more matrimonial-looking, don't ye think?

[He puffs and blows after the exertion then holds out his neck so that MATILDA can get to the stud.]

I never did agree with all this starch and stiffness for occasions, but . . . You'll never manage to get that through with your fingers, Matilda, they're just made of flesh and bone, not steel. What you want is a hairpin.

---

Applications for permission to perform this play must be made to Pinker's Play Bureau, Talbot House, Arundel Street, Strand, London, W.C.2.

[MATILDA goes to the dresser and opens a drawer.

Weddings and funerals do scare me these days. . . . Wasn't so bad when my fingers were young and tough, but they're too soft and tender now. . . . Why it is that everyone should dress so stiffly for weddings and funerals I don't know. (*Shifting from one foot to the other*) I should have had them boots on yesterday to bend them a bit. . . . Had to be threatening rain to-morrow, too, of course, to make things more difficult.

[*He sits for a moment to ease his feet.* MATILDA holds up a hairpin.

MATILDA: Will this one do, Jonathan?

JONATHAN: You'll need an old-fashioned one, Matilda; something that'll stand the strain. . . . Like everything else, boots aren't the same as what they used to be. I don't hear Nicodemus making much noise. *He* must be getting on all right.

[MATILDA goes to him with the hairpin. He rises, still complaining of his corns. She proceeds to insert the hairpin.

JONATHAN: Be careful, Matilda. I can remember my father losing nearly a square inch of skin from his neck once when . . . (*He is too late with his warning.*) Matilda! . . . Matilda! You're choking . . . me! Take it out again, quick!

[MATILDA does so and retreats a few steps, quite upset by the shock. It takes JONATHAN a few seconds to get his breath back.

JONATHAN: You ought to be more careful, Matilda. There's an art in getting hold of the *head* of the stud and no more. But you don't have your glasses on! How d'ye expect to perform such a delicate operation without spectacles! Put them on, Matilda.

MATILDA: I can see well enough, Jonathan; it's my hand that's too shaky—the excitement is doing it. Don't be angry, Jonathan, I'm not my natural self to-day.

JONATHAN: I'm not angry, Matilda, just pained. . . . Now take time and collect your senses; there's no desperate hurry. (*Illustrating with his thumb and forefinger how the job should be done*) Just get hold of the stud head nice and easy,

then give it a gentle twist when ye have got it through the collar. It's quite easy when you know how. . . . Take plenty of time . . . plenty of time.

[MATILDA makes another attempt.

Easy now—easy ! Oo ! . . .

[MATILDA steps back a pace, leaving the hairpin in the collar.

It's all right, Matilda, all right. I just thought ye were going to twist too quickly. . . . Easy now, easy, there's plenty of time.

[MATILDA manages to get the stud through.

That's right this time, Matilda. (*Gives his neck a twist or two*) Now I'll get my coat on and I'll be ready for any eventualities. (*Putting on his coat while MATILDA goes to the dresser with the hairpin*) Nicodemus is going about his dressing very quietly, isn't he ? Cool as a cucumber as usual. I don't think an earthquake would upset Nicodemus.

[JONATHAN wriggles himself till satisfied that the coat is hanging properly.

Not so stout as I used to be, Matilda. Two years ago, at Mother's funeral, I felt this coat a bit tight at the shoulders, remember ? (*He selects a flower from one of the vases and puts it in his buttonhole.*) Does that look all right, Matilda ?

MATILDA: I think so.

JONATHAN (*now a bit more comfortable*) : Flowers for weddings ; the symbol of happiness. (*Sighs.*) We'll miss Nicodemus, too, Matilda—he's been a good son to us.

MATILDA: Yes, we'll—we'll miss him, Jonathan.

[*She is near to tears.*

JONATHAN (*patting her on the shoulder*) : No tears, Matilda. No tears. Remember that he's getting a good wife in Rebecca Hollycock, and he's marrying respectable, thank God. I'll go and see how he's getting on. Perhaps he's stuck with his collar.

[*Before he goes to the room he pats MATILDA on the shoulder.*

I know how you feel, Matilda, I know how you feel. My mother was the same when I got wed, exactly the same.

[*He goes off to the room. MATILDA has a little weep to herself.*

JONATHAN *is no sooner gone than he returns in an excited state.*

MATILDA ! There's no Nicodemus in there !

MATILDA (*astonished*) : He isn't there ?

JONATHAN : No. His wedding clothes are still lying on the bed where ye left them. And the bottom half of the window is wide open.

MATILDA : Where can he have gone ?

JONATHAN : I don't know.

MATILDA : *Why* has he gone ?

JONATHAN : I've no idea !

[*They look at each other for a moment, astounded.*]

JONATHAN : He went in there to get ready, didn't he ?

MATILDA : Yes.

JONATHAN : Well, he isn't there. He's gone out the window.

MATILDA : You'll have to go and look for him, Jonathan. He hasn't too much time now.

JONATHAN : But where can I look for him ?

MATILDA : He may be in the cowshed, Jonathan. The old shorthorn isn't keeping too well.

JONATHAN : And does a sick cow come before his own wedding ?

MATILDA : You know how strange Nicodemus is at times, Jonathan.

JONATHAN (*angry*) : Nicodemus is a damned fool. Twenty minutes to his wedding time and he isn't to be seen. . . . Damn him ! That's what I say.

MATILDA : Don't get angry, Jonathan. The poor boy may just be excited. You know how trying it is. I can remember yourself on your wedding morn as pale as a lily and trembling like a leaf.

JONATHAN : Yes, but I was *there*—and in *time*. Twenty minutes, look ! and no word of him.

[*He goes to the outside door and shouts.*]



Nicodemus ! . . . Nicodemus !

MATILDA: Oh, my poor boy.

[JONATHAN returns.

Do you see him, Jonathan ?

JONATHAN: Coming over from the cowshed he is, with his hands deep in his pockets and not seeming to care a damn.

MATILDA: Jonathan, dear, don't swear like that. It isn't done on a wedding morning.

JONATHAN (*to get it off his chest*): Damn ! Damn ! DAMN !

[NICODEMUS enters, quite leisurely. He is a strong, easy-going, rather surly-looking fellow of thirty years of age. He wears working clothes, the clothes of a farm-worker, for he attends to the little holding which is part of their livelihood.

(When NICODEMUS enters.) Have ye forgotten the time ?

NICODEMUS (*calmly*): No.

JONATHAN: Then you'll know that there's only twenty minutes to spare—and to get to the church at that ?

NICODEMUS: Yes.

JONATHAN: Then why aren't ye dressing ?

NICODEMUS: I've changed my mind.

JONATHAN (*astounded*): You've what ?

NICODEMUS: I don't think I'll get married after all.

[*This comes as a shock to the parents.*

JONATHAN: Ye don't think you'll . . . get married after all ?

NICODEMUS: No.

JONATHAN: Ye—don't—think—ye'll—get—married ?

NICODEMUS: That's what I said.

JONATHAN: Why not ?

NICODEMUS: I've just changed my mind.

[*He sits and stretches his legs, quite leisurely. JONATHAN stands looking down on him. MATILDA is too astonished to speak.*

JONATHAN: Why have ye changed your mind?

NICODEMUS: I'm not in the mood for it this morning.

JONATHAN (*who can't believe his own ears*): You're not in the mood to get married?

NICODEMUS: No.

JONATHAN: Don't ye realize, Nicodemus Greenwell, that all arrangements have been made for you marrying Rebecca Hollycock in the church at eleven o'clock?

NICODEMUS: Yes.

JONATHAN: And that everybody invited will be there at that time?

NICODEMUS: I suppose they will.

JONATHAN: Yet you're not in the mood for it?

NICODEMUS: Honestly, I'm not.

MATILDA: Oh, my poor boy!

JONATHAN: Look here, Nicodemus, you're going to church this morning and taking Rebecca for your wife, if I have to wheel you there in a barrow.

[NICODEMUS *rises*.

NICODEMUS: What's that?

JONATHAN: You're going to church, see, if I have to . . .

[NICODEMUS *is now in a threatening attitude and JONATHAN retreats from him a few steps*.

NICODEMUS: If ye have to what?

MATILDA: Jonathan, you're only upsetting the lad.

JONATHAN: Upsetting him! And what about me? What about you? What about poor Rebecca and her folks? What about the scandal? What about folk's tongues?

NICODEMUS: Folk don't matter nothing to me.

JONATHAN: And doesn't Rebecca?

NICODEMUS: Not much.

JONATHAN: Not much? In the name o' God what's happened to ye?

NICODEMUS (*sitting*): Nothing.

JONATHAN: You're well enough, are ye?

NICODEMUS: Quite well, thank ye.

JONATHAN: Then what is wrong?

NICODEMUS: I've just changed my mind, that's all.

MATILDA: But ye can't change your mind now, Nicodemus. What about Rebecca?

NICODEMUS: She can wait till my mind changes back again.

JONATHAN (*wiping his forehead*): Well, of all the things to happen. . . . (*To MATILDA*) What are we going to do?

MATILDA: You'll have to tell the Vicar, Jonathan.

JONATHAN: Ay, that's what I'll do. (*To NICODEMUS*) I'll get the Vicar to ye, my lad, and he'll soon let ye understand where ye are. (*Going out*) "Changed my mind!" Fifteen minutes before the time! . . . It must be madness—madness!

[JONATHAN hurries out, still mopping his forehead.

NICODEMUS whistles a slow monotonous tune, such as "No place like Home." MATILDA looks at him rather sadly.

MATILDA: Don't ye think it would be wiser to make up your mind, Nicodemus, and save the Vicar from rebuking ye?

[NICODEMUS just shakes his head in reply, whistling the while.

It'll be a terrible talk in the place, Nicodemus. Ye know how the folk of Holly Rise can gossip and make up stories.

[He just keeps whistling and makes no reply.

Did something happen between you and Rebecca last night?

[NICODEMUS keeps on whistling, but answers in the negative by shaking his head again.

MATILDA: But something must have happened, Nicodemus?

NICODEMUS: No, nothing happened.

MATILDA: My poor boy, it's just the excitement, isn't it? Go and get your clothes on and save any trouble.

NICODEMUS: I don't like the look of her.

MATILDA: Who? Rebecca?

NICODEMUS: No, the cow. I think we should get the vet. along to see her.

MATILDA: But a cow doesn't matter on a morning like this, Nicodemus?

NICODEMUS: It does to me.

MATILDA: The folk'll be beginning to gather at church, Nicodemus.

NICODEMUS: I suppose they will.

MATILDA: And they're never suspecting that there won't be a wedding.

NICODEMUS: No, it'll be a big surprise to them.

MATILDA: And poor Rebecca will be all dressed now and just sitting looking at the clock.

NICODEMUS: Yes, she'll be looking at the clock.

MATILDA: But ye can't be so cruel as wound her heart like this, Nicodemus?

NICODEMUS: She'll get over it in time.

MATILDA: Won't ye go on with it for my sake, Nicodemus?

NICODEMUS: No.

MATILDA: Not for the sake of your own mother?

NICODEMUS: No.

MATILDA: But won't ye be afraid to face the folk if ye don't get wed, Nicodemus?

NICODEMUS: No.

MATILDA: You're quite sure? It's a horrible thing to have everyone looking at ye and talking about ye.

NICODEMUS: I don't mind.

MATILDA: The Vicar *will* be angry, Nicodemus.

NICODEMUS: It isn't possible.

MATILDA: He'll speak about ye in church on Sunday.

NICODEMUS: Well, it'll be the first time he'll have had *something* to speak about.

[*There is a knock on the door and EMMA HOLLYCOCK enters. She is a stoutish lady, red of face, and perspiring. She is dressed in light material, very gay, and is full of high spirits.*]

EMMA: Isn't it a God's blessing that the weather is so fine this morning, Mrs. Greenwell? Would ye believe it, I'm as excited this morning as if I were to be the bride. . . . I can't rest a moment. I'm all a-flutter with the excitement of it. And Rebecca looks so lovely, too; just like a picture in a fairy story book. And the darling is so nervous and excited and all worked up, hot and bothered. . . .

[*Then she sees that there is something wrong.*]

What's the matter, Mrs. Greenwell?

MATILDA: Nicodemus isn't wanting to be married this morning.

[*EMMA nearly faints with the shock.*]

EMMA: Ain't wanting to be married?

[*NICODEMUS shakes his head once more.*]

EMMA: But what's happened, Nicodemus?

NICODEMUS: Nothing.

EMMA: Oh, what a scandal! . . . What a sensation! . . . What a disappointment! . . . After me spending three whole pounds preparing for this wedding, and it ain't coming off. Nicodemus Greenwell, think shame of yourself. Think black burning shame. . . .

MATILDA (*interrupting*): Emma Hollycock, will ye hold your tongue. My poor boy doesn't want to hear you talk on and on like that. He wants peace.

EMMA: Peace? And d'ye think he'll get it? D'ye think his conscience will rest at peace when he knows that he has broken the heart of poor Rebecca? Poor soul, the shock will be enough to kill her. Nicodemus Greenwell, you're a villian, you're a monster, you're a blackguard and a scoundrel. (*In tears*) Oh, poor Rebecca sitting down there



all dressed up like a fairy and . . . now there's to be no wedding. What's your reason !

NICODEMUS : I'm not in the mood for weddings this morning.

EMMA : Why not ?

NICODEMUS : Just because I'm not.

EMMA : I must go and break the news to poor Rebecca. . . . She'll faint in her father's arms, I know she will—faint as stiff as a poker and perhaps die in his hands. . . . Poor, poor Rebecca, and she's such a sweet girl, too, such a treasure for any man. But I've always said, Nicodemus Greenwell, that ye were never fit to blacken her shoes. Now I know it; now everybody will soon know it—ye scurvy, low, mean—clodhopper !

*[She is about to go out when JONATHAN and the VICAR enter.]*

JONATHAN : Where are you going ?

EMMA : To break the news to poor Rebecca.

JONATHAN : If there's any news to be broken, Mr. Giles'll do it. You stay here till you're told to go.

*[So she sits down. JONATHAN takes up his stand with his elbow leaning on the dresser. MATILDA is trembling with the anxiety of the occasion. THE VICAR enters full of confidence. He is middle-aged, of thoughtful appearance.]*

VICAR : Good morning, Nicodemus !

NICODEMUS : Morning !

VICAR : Your father has just told me about your rather unexpected decision.

NICODEMUS : Yes.

VICAR : Of course you're not serious, Nicodemus. You don't really mean it ?

NICODEMUS : No ?

VICAR : Of course not. You're a man whom we all respect for your uprightness and good common-sense. I can well understand what has happened to you, Nicodemus. . . . It's just the excitement—a little overstrung. I have known it to happen to people before—affected them in the very same way. You have no real reason for your action !

NICODEMUS: No.

VICAR: I told you so. Now, if you just start and get ready, Nicodemus, I'm quite certain that you will return to normal. There's nothing to be ashamed of, nothing at all. It was just the other week that I read in the paper of a professor—a professor, mark you, and a highly intelligent man—who was affected in the same way; could give no reason, no earthly reason at all. And eventually when he was persuaded to go through with the ceremony he was surprised that he had behaved in such a manner. Now you just get into your clothes, Nicodemus, and I'll wait here until you're ready.

[THE VICAR smiles, thinking he has persuaded NICODEMUS, and JONATHAN is almost certain that he has. But NICODEMUS doesn't stir a single muscle.]

NICODEMUS: I don't feel in the mood.

[JONATHAN shows his exasperation. Poor MATILDA has reached the stage when she doesn't know what's happening to them all.]

VICAR (again in a nice persuasive manner): There is nothing in the ceremony, Nicodemus, that is likely to upset you.

NICODEMUS: It won't, 'cause I won't be there.

[JONATHAN is now tearing into the flesh of his hands with his finger-nails. EMMA is looking at NICODEMUS with a glance that would kill. MATILDA can only look helplessly at her poor boy, who isn't in the least perturbed. THE VICAR coughs, and we can hear a slight annoyance in the cough.]

VICAR: You realize, of course, Nicodemus, that you will cause a good deal of pain and suffering to all concerned if you persist in this attitude?

NICODEMUS: They'll get over it.

VICAR: Not only so, but there may arise a good deal of ill-feeling?

NICODEMUS: It'll pass off in time.

JONATHAN: Look here, Nicodemus . . .

[THE VICAR holds up his hand to JONATHAN.]

VICAR: It's all right, Mr. Greenwell, it's all right. I understand perfectly what has happened to Nicodemus. It is just a phase which will pass if we persevere.

[JONATHAN *looks at* NICODEMUS, *grinding his teeth*.

It is a fear, Nicodemus, which is born of nervous excitement.

NICODEMUS: Fear? What for? I'm not afeared of anything.

VICAR: You don't think so, Nicodemus, but you are. You see, that's your trouble. You don't think there's anything wrong with you. . . .

NICODEMUS: There ain't.

JONATHAN: And there ain't!

[THE VICAR *again holds up his hand to* JONATHAN.

EMMA: I know what's wrong with him. It's because he's . . .

[THE VICAR *holds up his hand, rather sternly, at* EMMA, *and she shuts up*.

VICAR (*rather sternly*): Nicodemus, you can already see how unpopular you are becoming by adopting this attitude.

NICODEMUS: I don't care.

VICAR: I'm afraid I must adopt a sterner attitude with you.

NICODEMUS (*with eyes towards ceiling*): Waste of time.

EMMA: Thinks he has Rebecca on a string tied to his little finger, he does. (*Sarcastic*) Not this morning, Rebecca, dear, but some other morning when I'm in the mood . . . eh? I could scratch your eyes out, Nicodemus.

VICAR: Now, now, Miss Hollycock, we can't have that kind of talk here. If you can't keep your temper, will you please go outside.

EMMA (*rising*): Of course I'll go and tell everyone what's happened.

JONATHAN: You'll sit here till I tell ye to go.

[*And* JONATHAN *bars her way to the door*.

MATILDA: My poor boy, what you're coming through. . . . Won't you listen to Mr. Giles, Nicodemus . . . for my sake?

NICODEMUS: I've been listening.

EMMA: Yes, in one ear and out t'other.

VICAR (*angry*): I must ask you again, Miss Hollycock, to hold your peace. This is a very trying situation for us all, and we don't want any hindrance.

EMMA: Very well, I'll hold my peace, but if I had anything to do with him, I know what I'd do—I'd . . . Carry on.

VICAR (*to* NICODEMUS): To-morrow, Nicodemus, you'll be a very sad and disillusioned man. You understand, of course, that if you fail Miss Hollycock to-day, you'll lose her for ever.

[NICODEMUS *doesn't believe this, and shakes his head so.*

NICODEMUS: Not a bit of it.

VICAR: Oh, but you will. And, mark you, you will lose a very excellent woman.

EMMA: Too damned good for *him*, anyway.

VICAR (*shocked*): Miss Hollycock !

EMMA: I'm her aunt, the only aunt she has, and I'm going to stick up for her.

VICAR: Very well. Very well. (*To* NICODEMUS) Now just go and get into your clothes, Nicodemus, and we'll all wait patiently till you're ready. If the ceremony is a few minutes late, it won't really matter. We can get a message sent down to Miss Hollycock that you have been delayed. Or you can put the blame on me if you wish.

JONATHAN: Now, there's an offer for ye, Nicodemus. Mr. Giles is prepared to take the blame of the whole thing being late.

MATILDA: Please, Nicodemus.

NICODEMUS: For the last time—*no* !

[THE VICAR *rises in anger.*

VICAR: Nicodemus ! Are you aware that the Lord will punish you for this ? . . . Have you no feeling in your breast for the woman who has consented to be your wife ? Have you no respect for your parents—no honour—no ? . . .

NICODEMUS: No.

VICAR (*to JONATHAN, throwing up sponge*): I'm sorry, Mr. Greenwell, but I can do no more.

[*They are all looking at NICODEMUS in their different ways when the door opens and LUKE enters.*]

LUKE *is a man of eighty years, small of stature, but as sharp as a needle. He is dressed for the wedding, but he must have shrunk quite a bit since the suit was made for him. He enters like a little whirlwind.*

LUKE: Ah, well, here we are again ! Here we are again ! A sunny morning in June and a wedding. What is there on the face of this earth that can gladden the heart like them two things ? Nicodemus, my lad, there's only one thing I regret this morning and that is that I'm not Nicodemus Greenwell. A morning like this with a girl like Rebecca Hollycock for a bride, why, I'd be standing on my head and kicking my heels in the air with sheer joy ! But why aren't ye dressed, Nicodemus ? (*To JONATHAN*) Isn't it about time for the wedding, Jonathan ?

JONATHAN: There ain't going to be any wedding, Father.

LUKE: No wedding ?

NICODEMUS: No.

LUKE: Why not ?

JONATHAN (*sarcastically*): He ain't in the mood.

VICAR: Nicodemus has refused absolutely, Mr. Greenwell, to go on with it.

EMMA: I know what he wants. I know what he should get. I know . . .

NICODEMUS: Oh, shut up !

EMMA: I won't shut up. I'm the aunt of poor Rebecca and . . .

VICAR: Please, Miss Hollycock, your voice is so very loud.

LUKE (*astonished*): Ain't going to get married ? (*More deliberately*) Ain't going to get married ! Morning in June, pretty girl like Rebecca, and you ain't going to get married ?

NICODEMUS: Why should I ?



LUKE: Why should roses bloom? Why should birds sing? Why should the sun shine? Because it's natural, that's why.

[NICODEMUS *shakes his head in disagreement.*

LUKE: Ye don't believe me?

NICODEMUS: No, I don't.

LUKE: What's wrong with you, Nicodemus, and always has been, is that ye have no imagination.

NICODEMUS: No what?

LUKE: Imagination. You're just a log of wood. (*Looking straight at NICODEMUS*) Not wanting to get married. . . . A man of your age . . . on a morning like this—to Rebecca Hollycock, whom any man with imagination would run off with, ye fool, because a wedding was too slow a way to get her.

VICAR: I'm afraid Nicodemus will never be persuaded. I think I had better go and break the sad news to Mr. Hollycock.

LUKE: Wait a minute, Mr. Giles. Wait a minute, I want to speak to Nicodemus. (*Sits in front of him.*) Nic, you ain't all made of wood, are ye? Of course you ain't. There's a soft part of humanity in ye somewhere, or ye'd never have had a liking for Rebecca in the first place. Now what's wrong with you is that you've never let yourself go with her. You've walked with her, and talked with her about crops and cattle and things like that. But have ye ever kissed her?

NICODEMUS: No.

LUKE (*to others*): Didn't I tell ye? (*To NICODEMUS*) Ye don't know what it is to kiss a woman?

NICODEMUS: No.

LUKE: And the reason has been because you were afraid?

[NICODEMUS *has no answer to this.*

You've been afraid because Rebecca was too strange to ye. Now you've been dying many a time to kiss her, but ye hadn't that freedom. So ye didn't. And to this day ye don't know the joy that's in a kiss.

VICAR: But really, Mr. Greenwell, I don't think you should talk like that. It's not done.

LUKE: Vicars are good for lots of things, sitting at death-beds and things like that, but this is a case for real imagination. (*To NICODEMUS*) To kiss a woman, Nic, is one of the grandest sensations that the heart of man can experience. Just imagine it, a pretty woman like Rebecca in your arms, yours completely,—looking into these blue eyes of hers, then down on that pretty mouth smiling for ye, man, smiling for ye, and just like rose petals dipped in dew. Doesn't the very thought of it make ye tremble with joy?

[NICODEMUS *is becoming impressed.*]

It's only natural that ye can't steal this joy with a woman that's only courted by ye. But when she becomes yours, man—yours for ever and a day! And when these eyes and rosy lips are yours all the time. . . . Don't ye think you're missing something?

NICODEMUS: Well, I may be.

LUKE: Then picture yourself working out in the fields—and ye won't have your mother for ever, you know—picture yourself working out in them fields knowing that you're going home to a pretty girl dressed in a pretty frock ready to wait on ye hand and foot, ready to kiss ye when ye come home, grimy face and all. A nice clean little house, food that's cooked with loving hands to perfection. Then sitting together beside the fire just looking at each other and whispering sweet words in each other's ear. Wouldn't ye call that real happiness?

NICODEMUS: I believe I would.

[*There is some excitement now, for they all see that LUKE is making an impression.*]

LUKE: Well then, realize that life can give you no more than that, Nic Greenwell—not a drop of happiness more, no matter how great you may be in this world, no matter how rich you may be. Ye have everything that the heart of man can desire. Am I right?

NICODEMUS: I believe you are.

LUKE: And do ye realize how near ye are to missing all this? For mark ye, if ye let this chance slip, you'll never get another woman to look ye in the face again.

[NICODEMUS rises slowly. They instinctively get closer to LUKE and him. LUKE rises too.

Ye have only minutes between a life of happiness and a life of misery. Mr. Giles is prepared to wait another five minutes but no more. Isn't that right, Vicar?

VICAR: Five minutes only, Mr. Greenwell.

LUKE (to NICODEMUS): Eyes as blue as the skies—lips like red roses—loving hands that will cook to perfection—Nic, ye have five minutes.

[NICODEMUS pauses for a second or two. Then he makes up his mind very definitely and hurries off to the room to dress. There is silent rejoicing. They all shake LUKE's hand, who puts a finger over his mouth to warn them to be silent. EMMA, after signing with her hands that she is going to get ready to go to church, goes out.

JONATHAN gets a bottle of whisky from the cupboard. MATILDA gets the glasses. Drinks are filled out and they drink a silent toast. This silent business to be timed to give NICODEMUS time to change. NICODEMUS puts his head out door—just his head, for he is already undressed.

NICODEMUS: Father, give me a hand with this stud.

JONATHAN: The hairpin, Matilda—the hairpin!

[MATILDA hurries and gives him the hairpin. JONATHAN hurries off to the room.

LUKE signs to THE VICAR to sit down. They both sit. LUKE empties his glass and signs to MATILDA to fill it again. He nods his head to THE VICAR to drink up and have another. THE VICAR signs back that he can't, slipping an imaginary ring on his finger reminding LUKE that he has a wedding to perform. LUKE agrees that one glass is enough, but after the wedding is over they'll have another one together. THE VICAR agrees. JONATHAN returns with the news that NICODEMUS is hurrying at a great speed. He looks in the mirror and arranges his tie and flower. MATILDA hurries and puts her hat on. LUKE drinks up and rises, buttoning his coat. THE VICAR rises, calls them together and whispers something to them. They all agree. It is that he would be

*better to go on and leave them to follow. He is on his way out when EMMA returns, much paler, and all out of breath. She signs to THE VICAR to wait till she gets her breath back. They all look at her. There is a pause. NICODEMUS enters with his vest and coat in his hand, in a great hurry. When he sees them all standing looking at EMMA, he senses that something is wrong.*

VICAR: What is it, Miss Hollycock? You look quite upset.

EMMA: It's Rebecca, Mr. Giles, Rebecca . . .

NICODEMUS: What's the matter with my Rebecca?

*[They look at NICODEMUS, then back again to EMMA.]*

EMMA: Rebecca . . . She's ran off with the best man!

*[They can only stare at the palpitating EMMA. Then the curtain is lowered.]*

Neil Grant

OLIVIA AND THE DUKE

*The Swing of the Pendulum in Theatrical Life*



# CHARACTERS

OLIVIA

THE DUKE

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SCENE: *A dressing-room of the leading lady in the Mona Bartlett touring Shakespearean Company in the Victoria Theatre, West Hartlepool. The room is scantily furnished; a curtained recess hides the wardrobe. There is a telephone beside a large table with mirror, at which OLIVIA, in "Twelfth Night" costume, is seated.*

OLIVIA (*putting the finishing touch to her make-up; then on the telephone*): Send Mr. Bumpstead. Yes, please.

[*She puts down the receiver, then mournfully looks at some returns. There is a knock.*

Come in.

[*THE DUKE enters. He also is fully made up for his part in "Twelfth Night." He is a smallish, somewhat insignificant type. He looks at OLIVIA much in the manner of a spaniel looking at its mistress. He closes the door, on a nod from her. She hands him the returns. He looks at them.*

Look at those returns. We'll be down fifty on the week.

[*THE DUKE returns them, sighs, then cheerfully*:

DUKE: There's Saturday.

OLIVIA: I've made allowance for that.

DUKE: There was fog last night.

OLIVIA: There always is in these parts. Look at these *matinée* figures.

DUKE: There was the agricultural show.

OLIVIA (*tartly*): I didn't know agriculture competed with Shakespeare.

DUKE: Everything competes with Shakespeare—(*romantically*)—and yet he lives.

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The play is published by Messrs. Samuel French in *Seven New Plays*, by Neil Grant, forming Vol. 8 of *The One Act Theatre*, at 2s. 6d. net.

OLIVIA: It'll be worse at Rochdale next week.

DUKE: Have you heard from that new advance agent?

OLIVIA: Prout—no, not yet.

DUKE: Wonderful applause last night.

OLIVIA: It reminded me of the flapping of a big bird in a lonely wood.

DUKE: And things may pull up to-night, Miss Bartlett.

OLIVIA: Worse to-night than last night. That local manager was rude to me just now.

DUKE: Oh, Miss Bartlett, how horrible. Rude to you, our Queen of Arden. I shall go to him now.

*[He is about to move to the door.]*

OLIVIA (*pointing to chair beside her*): Sit down, Mr. Bumpstead. I wish to speak to you.

*[He sits down abashed in the presence of a goddess. She looks at him, then quietly:]*

Mr. Bumpstead, I am going to retire.

DUKE (*rising, horrified*): Retire! Miss Bartlett!

OLIVIA: Sit down, Mr. Bumpstead. Yes. Retire.

DUKE (*aghast*): Leave the stage? Leave the scene of so many glories?

OLIVIA: I'm finished!

DUKE (*almost weeping*): No. No.

OLIVIA: Yes, my day is done.

DUKE: Because these wretched people have forgotten us, have failed to appreciate the greatest Shakespearean actress of our time since the lamented death of our ever-beloved Ellen Terry—no, no, Miss Bartlett.

OLIVIA: Derby and Llandudno were almost as bad. It's the writing on the wall. (*Permitting herself a little histrionics*) Exit!

DUKE: The North of England without its Bartlett who alone keeps aloft the torch of the immortal bard ! Unthinkable ! What will happen ?

OLIVIA: The North will get on very well without me. They have their cinemas, their cars, their ice-rinks, their wireless.

DUKE: But what about their culture ? Oh dear, dear, dear !

OLIVIA: I've seen it coming for some time. I'm best out of it.

DUKE (*really distressed*): But no longer to gaze at the gracious Olivia as I do now, no longer to hear the raillery and wit of Beatrice—"Kill Claudio"—every time you hiss these words, I thrill to the marrow—or the sleep-walking of Lady Macbeth or the poignant poetry of the garden scene in "Richard the Second"—the happiness I've had in the wings watching you—and sometimes when I'm on with you so enthralled by your art that I forget my own lines——

OLIVIA (*dryly*): So I have observed.

DUKE: And to think I may never see or hear such performances again——

OLIVIA: This is my last tour.

DUKE: Miss Bartlett, England will never be the same again.

OLIVIA: Yes, it will. I'm old and England's young.

DUKE: You're not old. And what is age ?

OLIVIA: Everything, to a woman.

DUKE: You defy age. What other woman of your—er—years could play Juliet ?

OLIVIA: They haven't the cheek.

DUKE: They haven't the art !

OLIVIA: I'm going to clear out. I've made up my mind.

DUKE (*waving his hand in despair*): "When the lamp is shattered, the light in the dust lies dead."

OLIVIA: And I can afford to retire.

DUKE: Yes.

OLIVIA: I have been careful.

DUKE: Very.

OLIVIA: But not grasping or unfair.

DUKE: No—no——

OLIVIA: Whatever some people may say. Do you know that that snippet of a Treadgold girl has the insolence to ask for four-ten——

DUKE (*smiling*): These young people are very difficult—did you tell her what you've gone through—what we've all gone through——

OLIVIA (*rising vindictively*): I did. But never mind her. It took me fifteen minutes the other day to teach her how to open a door. (*Urbanely as she sits down again*) I'm going to retire to Hampstead.

DUKE (*poetically*): Where Keats heard the nightingale.

OLIVIA: I've got an eye on a little house—(*as poetically as she can*)—with a nice little garden.

DUKE: All Shakespeare's heroines loved flowers—if you count up the references——

OLIVIA: You're fond of gardening, aren't you, Mr. Bumpstead?

DUKE: Yes, when I have the opportunity. My brother, William, has a little plot behind his house at Pinner and when I'm in town I sometimes give him a hand with the dahlias and the nasturtiums and also with the roses.

OLIVIA: How long have you been with me?

DUKE: Seventeen years.

OLIVIA: Fancy!

DUKE: The happiest years of my life.

OLIVIA: Would you like to look after my garden, Mr. Bumpstead?

DUKE: Whenever I'm in town I should be only too delighted.

OLIVIA: I mean permanently.



DUKE (*weakly*): Permanently !

OLIVIA: I think I once heard you say you were keen on carpentry.

DUKE: Yes—I have handled the plane and the saw.

OLIVIA: Gardening and carpentry—a useful combination.

DUKE: Would you like me to make you a little bookcase ? It would be a privilege.

OLIVIA: I would like you to make me—us—lots of things.

DUKE (*puzzled*): Certainly.

OLIVIA: Have you ever thought of what is going to happen to you, Mr. Bumpstead, when I retire ?

DUKE (*sadly*): I suppose I may get something.

OLIVIA: Mr. Bumpstead, you are a careful, well-behaved, sensible man. I like you. You never cause any trouble. You are content with what you get. (*As archly as she can*) Would you like to look after my garden—and its owner—permanently ?

DUKE (*staring at her*): I don't—understand—(*he and his chair begin slowly to recede*)—Miss Bartlett.

[*He has risen, but is still going backwards.*]

OLIVIA: You do understand—now——

DUKE: I can't believe——

OLIVIA: I am in earnest.

DUKE: It's—er—somewhat of a shock.

OLIVIA (*rising and angrily*): Mr. Bumpstead, you're not married already ?

DUKE: Oh, no.

OLIVIA: No other attachment, I hope ?

DUKE: None. My work is all in all to me.

OLIVIA (*sitting down*): Let me see. What is your Christian name ?

DUKE: Edwin.

OLIVIA: You may henceforward call me by the name that always brings back to me my happy days with Papa and Mamma—Babs !

DUKE (*frightened*): Oh, I couldn't.

[*With a gesture she orders him to bring his chair a little nearer. He does so.*]

OLIVIA: Come, come—er—Edwin—am I such an ogre ?

DUKE: Miss Bartlett—an ogre !

OLIVIA: Is a future—er—in association with me so—so horrifying ?

DUKE: No, Miss Bartlett.

OLIVIA (*sweetly*): Babs !

DUKE: Not quite yet, Miss Bartlett. I really couldn't at present. By and by, maybe. You see——

OLIVIA: Yes ?

DUKE: You see, Miss Bartlett, I have never looked upon you as an ordinary woman.

OLIVIA: I am not an ordinary woman.

DUKE: I mean I have looked upon you as a star apart—someone to worship.

OLIVIA: You can still go on worshipping me. I have no objection.

DUKE: Yes, but—(*blurting out*)—oh dear—it's terribly difficult. I am highly honoured—deeply moved—I appreciate your—er—offer—I hope I shall give every—er—satisfaction. It's more than I deserve. Only I see you always with the towers of Elsinore in the background—or in the Forest of Arden or on the Nile with Iras and Charmian at your side——

OLIVIA: I'm finished with all that. I can't live in Elsinore on nothing. I can't have Iras and Charmian without paying them more than they're worth—confound them—I loathe every tree and blade of grass in the Forest of Arden——

DUKE: But your public—your wonderful public——

OLIVIA (*blazing*): They're a rotten, ungrateful lot and I'm finished with them. The British public have no gratitude—they're fickle to a degree—I hate them. Damn them all !

DUKE: But Shakespeare——

OLIVIA: Shakespeare be hanged.

[THE DUKE *reels*.

I'm finished with him too.

[THE DUKE *cowers in his chair*.

I'll throw a chair at the next person who spouts blank verse at me. I'm never going on the stage again—never—never—never—I'm going to have a house in Hampstead, I tell you—I'm going to have a garden and a carpenter's shop—I'm going to keep chickens—and a husband—and I make the offer to you, Mr.—Mr.—Edwin, and let me tell you you'll never get a better.

DUKE: What will the profession say ?

OLIVIA: Let them sneer and jeer. I shan't hear them at Hampstead.

DUKE: This is terrible.

OLIVIA: Don't moan, Edwin. Are you going to stand by me ?

DUKE: Certainly.

OLIVIA: Or are you going to trample on me, too ?

DUKE: No—no—Miss Bartlett.

OLIVIA: Didn't I ask you to call me Babs ?

DUKE (*gulping it down*): Babs.

OLIVIA (*whimpering*): I believe you hate me.

DUKE: I adore you.

VOICE (*off*): Overture and Beginners.

DUKE: Oh dear ! Oh dear !

[*He makes for the door*.

OLIVIA: Words !

DUKE (*returning*): What else have I but words?

OLIVIA: As long as they're not that Shakespeare's words. I want deeds.

[*She weeps.*]

DUKE: I'll do anything you like.

OLIVIA: To come to this—alone—bankrupt—without a friend—my offer rejected.

DUKE: Let us be married by all means——

[*The telephone bell goes. She stands pitifully against the wall. The bell goes again.*]

(*Timidly*) Shall I answer?

OLIVIA: Let it ring.

[*The bell rings again.*]

DUKE: Perhaps I'd better——

OLIVIA: If it's anything to do with the stage or Shakespeare, tell them I'm dead—for ever.

DUKE (*politely at the telephone*): Er—who's that? Oh, yes. (*To OLIVIA*) It's Mr. Prout.

OLIVIA: Who's he?

DUKE: Your new advance agent.

OLIVIA: I'm nowhere to be seen. I'm on stage.

DUKE (*at the 'phone*): Can I give a message?—(*A pause.*)—Most important—eh? I think perhaps, Miss Bartlett, you had better——

OLIVIA (*advancing; then in sepulchral tones*): Yes—what is it? (*She listens at the receiver, then her face brightens and she is soon radiant.*) What? Sold out? For Saturday night?—(*Pause.*)—Nonsense!—(*Pause.*)—Oh, Mr. Prout.

[*THE DUKE also begins to cheer up.*]

Ten schools! The Mayor? Thank you, Mr. Prout—Thank you so much. Really! And there's talk of an autumn tour. Ta-ta—you are a dear. What? I'm splendid—yes. Good-bye. (*She puts down the receiver, rises and then ecstatically*) Sold out for Rochdale next Saturday night!

DUKE (*delighted*): Oh, Miss Bartlett !

OLIVIA: The best bookings they've had for months.

DUKE: Didn't I tell you ?

OLIVIA: All the schools taking tickets. The Mayor coming for " Twelfth Night "—sixty pounds taken for Wednesday night alone.

DUKE: Wonderful ! Wonderful !

OLIVIA (*now in the full tide of histrionic excitement*): Splendid dates for an autumn tour. My public ! My beloved British public—so faithful, so generous, so discriminating, so true.

[THE DUKE gazes at her rapt in admiration.

They love their Bartlett, they love their Shakespeare !

[A call-boy can be heard off.

And we—Shakespeare and I—shall never desert you. (*Ecstatically*) Shakespeare and I shall lure you to the banks of the Nile, to Macbeth's grim castle, to the lovely glades of Arden !

[THE DUKE makes for the door. She sees him going ; then in haughty, business-like tones :

Mr. Bumpstead. I raise your salary by ten shillings weekly.

VOICE (*off*): Mr. Bumpstead ! Mr. Bumpstead !

DUKE (*rapturously*): Oh, Miss Bartlett ! Thank you ever so much.

CURTAIN





Evan John

STRANGERS' GOLD

*An Historical Comedy*

## CHARACTERS

DONALD – a Highland crofter

MAGGIE – his wife, of Lowland origin

ELSPETH – his mother

SHEELAGH – his daughter

THE DOCTOR – an English traveller

MR. BOSWELL – a Lowland laird

*Time:* Late summer of the year 1773

Ideas for costume and setting can be derived from Boswell's *A Tour to the Hebrides*, especially the thirteenth paragraph of the book, and the passage dated August 30th.

SCENE: *The interior of DONALD's cottage in the Western Highlands. There is a rough table near the centre of the stage, at which stand two stools. In the back wall is an open doorway and, to left of it, a small, deep-set window. A door in the right-hand wall leads to an inner room. By the left-hand wall is a small peat fire. Above it, a spinning-wheel.*

DONALD, about thirty-five years of age, sits moping, back to audience, on a stool below the fire. Above him, in a chair, ELSPETH sits mending clothes. She is between sixty and seventy, white-haired and wrinkled, but surprisingly active in mind and body. MAGGIE, a strapping young woman from the Lowlands, is mixing dough for bannocks at the table, and glancing disapprovingly at DONALD. She leaves her work to go to the doorway.

MAGGIE: Sheelagh ! . . . Sheelagh ! ! . . . Mither, d'ye ken where Sheelagh is ?

ELSPETH: I do not.

MAGGIE (*returning to her work*): Donald, is it no' time ye went to meet Archie Morrison ? . . . D'ye hear me, Donald ? I'm asking you, is it no' time——

ELSPETH: Oh, leave the man alone. It's more than enough that he has to be worrying him already.

MAGGIE: What's that on your bonnet, Donald ? (*Going to him as she speaks, and taking it off his head*) Guid sakes, the man's droppit his new bonnet in the fire ! There's a hole burnt in it that I could put my thumb through.

ELSPETH: Do you be putting your thumb back in the bannocks and give me the bonnet. It will not be a minute before I have it darned for him. (*She takes it from MAGGIE.*) Get along with you now, and stop troubling your man.

MAGGIE (*returning to the table*): I doot I'll no' hae milk enough for the bannocks.

ELSPETH: Have you been after milking Mairi ?

MAGGIE: I have that—if ye can ca' it milking. (*She shows a small milk jug, half empty.*) That's a' I could get frae her, puir

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For permission to perform this play, application must be made to Messrs. Brown, Son, and Ferguson, 52 Darnley Street, Glasgow, who publish it at 1s. net.

beastie. I dinna ken why Donald would be wasting siller on a sick coo, when we canna afford a hale yin.

ELSPETH: Maybe Morag would be having a drop you could borrow. It would not be the first time.

MAGGIE: It's fine I ken that ! I'm sick to death of a' this borrowing. It's no' muckle better than beggars that we are.

ELSPETH: Wheesht, Maggie; you must not be talking that way. There's nobody in the glen that isna glad to help us, when it's their own kin they'd be helping.

MAGGIE: It's no' lang ye'll hae ony kin left in the glen, the way they're driving them awa'. There's Dugald and Ruarie Bheag leaving their crofts at the week's end.

ELSPETH: Dugald and Ruarie ? And where would they be going ?

MAGGIE: Where ? I'm thinking it'll be the same way as the others, into the ship that's lying in Oban harbour and across the seas to America. And I doot Archie Morrison's coming up to-day to tell us to follow them there. It's six months' rent that we're owing him.

ELSPETH: Hold your tongue, lass. It isna I nor Donald that'll be leaving the glen to go to America.

MAGGIE: I dinna ken where else we'll gang, if Archie bids us leave the croft. And I doot we'll be nane the waur for the change. There's fine land in America, and no chief to haud us doon.

DONALD (*breaking out in anger*): Fine land, is it ? And what havers is it you are talking, and you knowing nothing about it at all ? It's little enough land the last batch saw, and they sold as slaves in America !

MAGGIE: That's no' true. It's no' for slaves they went !

DONALD: It's little better they've become, I'm telling you. They were giving them a dirty scrap of paper when they stepped into the black ship at Oban, and, when they came to America, they sold them to work for the planters.

MAGGIE: I canna believe they'd do the like o' that.



ELSPETH: Ay, ay, ye canna believe what your own husband would be telling you, but you'd be putting your trust in the lies of the Lowland men that are wanting to drive us all out of the glen to make room for their sheep.

DONALD: It's the truth I'm telling you, Maggie. (*Rising and wrapping his plaid round him*) And now I must go and lick the dirt under Archie Morrison's feet, if we're not to go the same road as the others.

MAGGIE: Weel, weel, maybe you can talk him into giving us a wee bit time. Tell him we can maybe pay in a week or twa.

ELSPETH: If you're my son or your father's, you'll be telling Archie Morrison to quit the glen and take his dirty face where it's wanted!

DONALD: No, no, mother, I must not provoke him at all. It's six months' rent that we're owing, and it's a grand chance he has to be rid of us, and he wanting the croft for a sheep-run. . . . Have you finished mending my bonnet?

ELSPETH: I have not. (*As DONALD crosses to the doorway*) You'll not be needing a bonnet to meet the like of Archie Morrison.

[MAGGIE leaves her bannocks, and goes up to him at the door.]

MAGGIE: Keep hold o' yersel', while ye're talkin' to Archie. Dinna forget that he's your ain chief's factor, and it's hameless we'll be if ye lose your temper wi' him.

DONALD: And what way should I be losing my temper wi' him? He's not a bad man, for all he comes from Glasgow, and it's Himself that chose him for factor. Am I not after saying I'd humble myself to him, so that he'll maybe let our rent stand for a wee while.

MAGGIE: That's richt then, so long as ye're mindfu' o't. You Hieland folk are gey quick to anger, and then there's nae trusting what ye'll say.

ELSPETH: And what way did ye marry a Highlander, if you cannot be speaking well of them?

MAGGIE: What way? Mony's the time I've askit mysel' that question. (*To DONALD*) Be quick wi' you noo, and if you come back to tell us ye've talked Archie oot o' wanting the

rent for a wee, maybe I'll be glad I married a Hielander wi' a tongue on him that'd talk a lass oot of a' sense and reason.

[*Exit DONALD, smiling. MAGGIE returns to her bannocks.*]

ELSPETH: It is one thing to be joking, but it is not right that you should tell Donald to speak humble to a man like Archie Morrison. I am wondering what it is that Donald's father would have said to a wee lawyer from Glasgow, and him driving folk out of their homes.

MAGGIE: Archie Morrison's doing nae mair then he's bid. Ye ken as weel as I dae that it's your ain chief that's timming the glen o' decent folk for the sake o' a pickle o' siller. I dinna ken a laird in Lothian that's as hairtless as your Hielan' chiefs.

ELSPETH: You can be talking about the Highlands till your tongue is as dry as the Grey Stones in August, but for all that you know no more about them than the day that Donald brought you to his house. A chief is a chief, but it is not right that Donald should be bowing himself down before such a man as Archie Morrison.

MAGGIE: Then maybe you'd have us all pack off to America?

ELSPETH: You can be going to America when you're wanting, but it's not I nor Donald that will be coming with you across the great water.

MAGGIE: And supposing they mak' you?

ELSPETH: There's no power on earth can make me nor Donald quit the glen where I bore him, nor the house his father left to fight at Drummossie. If Cumberland's red-coats did not burn me out, and me the wife of one of Prince Charlie's clansmen, it isna a wee bit factor like Archie Morrison that can drive me away for want of a thimbleful of siller.

MAGGIE: Och, I've heard thae blethers afore! You Hieland folk are aye rantin' o' what's past, and shutting your een to what's under your neb. If Parliament hadna taken your claymores awa', ye'd be oot again as ye were at Culloden, and there'd be anither fule or twa kicking his life oot on the muirs.

ELSPETH: Maybe there would—and maybe it wouldna be Highland fools, but red-coats and lawyers and factors. There's more than one place where a claymore or a musket could lie hid, and nobody know that it was there at all.

MAGGIE: Och, maybe it's another Rebellion you'd be raising in the Highlands because Donald Og of Glenaughty canna scrape together the bawbees for the rent? I tell you that he'd do better to be thinking of civil words to say to Archie Morrison. I dinna ken what else there is that'll keep him here in the glen.

ELSPETH: Maybe there's a wheen of things that you "dinna ken." There's more than one way we might be staying in the glen. I had a dream last night and there was gold in it, fine English gold.

MAGGIE: A dream? I nicht hae kent it. What good is the like o' that against evictions and Acts o' Parliament? Your heids are a' fu' of dreams and muskets, and the ane's nae mair use than the tither before the wickedness o' your ain chiefs. Ye'll never learn sense till ye wake up in the morning and find yersel's in America!

*[During this speech, SHEELAGH, a bare-footed girl of twelve or fourteen, has appeared in the doorway, and wanders down right.]*

SHEELAGH: Wha's goin' to America?

ELSPETH: Nobody's going; it's just some havers your mother's after talking.

MAGGIE: And what for are ye coming speirin' in here when I tell't you to bide oot till supper-time? Did ye no' hear me?

SHEELAGH: Ay, but it's going to rain.

MAGGIE: Weel, ye can juist bide oot till it does rain. Here, fetch me a wee drap water frae the burn while I go down to Morag's and borrow that milk! The pitcher's in there.

*[She points SHEELAGH to the inner room, and departs; one sees her pass outside the window.]*

*Exit SHEELAGH in leisurely fashion. She returns with the pitcher and goes towards the outer door.*

SHEELAGH: What are ye doing there, grandmother?

ELSPETH: I am mending your father's bonnet.

SHEELAGH (*coming to her*): It's his new one. I didna know that he had torn it.

ELSPETH: Maybe not.

SHEELAGH (*seeking an excuse to linger*): How far will it be to America, grandmother? Will it be as far as Glasgow?

ELSPETH: Glasgow? The ignorance of you! It'll be a great deal further than Glasgow, I'm thinking! Why, America, that's as far away from here as . . . as London itself.

SHEELAGH: And is it true that it's Himself that would be driving the folk there, and not just Archie Morrison?

ELSPETH: Maybe it is now, but do not you say so when your mother would be there. It is not right that we should speak ill of a Highland chief, with Lowland folk to be hearing us. . . . Fetch the water now, as your mother bid you, or she'll be scolding the two of us when she comes back.

[SHEELAGH *moves towards the door, but suddenly stops, numb with astonishment.*

SHEELAGH: The Saints preserve us! What's that on the road?

ELSPETH: What is it then?

SHEELAGH: It's. . . . No, no. I'm thinking it's a monster.

ELSPETH (*rising*): What like is it?

SHEELAGH: It's like nothing at all, except itself. There's two men along with it, and there's horses, and maybe . . . No, no, it canna be a man.

ELSPETH (*joining her at the door*): Glory be to God and you're right! It's a monster it is.

SHEELAGH: Will it be folk from Fort William?

ELSPETH: There's no folk the like of that, even in Fort William. Surely to goodness . . .

[*She peers towards the road, dumbfounded. Then suddenly she relaxes, and speaks as one who has solved a mystery.*

Och, ay. I know what it is. It will just be an Englishman.

SHEELAGH: Are they like yon?

ELSPETH: They are that . . . and worse. Look you, they've left their horses now, and they are climbing up the burnside.



SHEELAGH: The monster's puffing and blowing like an old sow. What will they be wanting by the burn?

ELSPETH: Maybe it's the Grey Stones they would be seeking.

SHEELAGH: The Grey Stones, grandmother?

ELSPETH: I'm hearing that they would be writing books in England about stones and such like—much good may it do them.

*[She returns to her seat by the fire.]*

Do you be running down now, and fetching the water for your mother.

SHEELAGH: I'd be feart to go that gate now. They're close along the burn.

ELSPETH: And what way would they be harming a lass like you? I've heard little good of the English, but I do not think they would be eating children.

SHEELAGH (*still dubious on this point*): It's an awful fat stomach he has.

ELSPETH: Well, then, he'll be out of breath before he can catch you, and you running over the heather. And maybe it's a bawbee they would be giving you, if you were to tell them something daft about the Grey Stones. And the dafter you can make it the better.

SHEELAGH (*tempted*): A bawbee? I might go and . . . What's that at the window?

*[DONALD has appeared at the window, and is seen thrusting his arm up into the thatch. He is in a fit of ungovernable rage.]*

ELSPETH rises, putting her sewing on the table.

ELSPETH: What is it you'd be doing, Donald Og? Is it mad you are?

DONALD: Where is it then? I must have it out!

ELSPETH: You'll not find that easy, and it not there at all.

DONALD: Not there, is it? And who was it that would be moving it, the black curse upon them!

ELSPETH (*as DONALD moves round and in at the door*): Hold your wheesht, man, and stop laying curses on the mother that bore you.



DONALD: Well, and why would you be moving it, and it there these thirty years?

ELSPETH: I was thinking you'd maybe have a need for it, and I wasna wanting my son to be seen pulling a musket out of the thatch in the broad daylight. . . . Run along with you now, Sheelagh, and be doing as your mother bid you. (*As SHEELAGH departs*) . . . What is it that's come to you, Donald Og, that you'd be doing the like of that, and Englishmen watching you from the burn?

DONALD: I'm thinking you know what has come to me, and who it is I'm after talking to. A damned Glasgow thief that no decent Highlander should be seen with at all!

ELSPETH: Was he asking for the rent?

DONALD: Asking for the rent? He was that, and he was saying things . . . saying things . . . God help me! Give me that musket and be done with it! It's my father will be rising from his grave at Culloden if yon man isna dead before sunset.

[*ELSPETH disappears to fetch the musket, while DONALD pulls out a little box from a hiding-hole near the fireplace, talking as he does so. Meanwhile MAGGIE re-appears at the window, and stands watching for a moment. Then she is seen to remove a knife which DONALD has just left on the window-sill, and pass out of sight.*]

DONALD: Hurry up with you now, while I am getting the powder and bullets. Where is it you have been keeping it hid?

ELSPETH (*re-entering from the right*): Och, it's three nights that it's been beside me in bed, and it loaded and ready ever since Archie Morrison was up here last. So you can just be putting the powder and bullets back where you found them . . . Which way did he go?

DONALD: Down by the old kirk.

[*Replacing the box.*]

ELSPETH: Ay, it's lonely there. Was there anyone with him?

DONALD: There was that: one of the servants from the castle. I'll need my knife. Where now did I put my knife?

[*As he is searching, SHEELAGH bursts in.*]

SHEELAGH: They're coming ! They're coming in here !

DONALD: Who's coming in here ?

SHEELAGH: The monster and that other one.

ELSPETH: Och, it's the Englishmen, the black plague upon them ! What way would you be bringing them in here ?

SHEELAGH: I couldna stop them. I couldna understand what they would be saying.

[DONALD hastily seizes the musket, and wraps it up in his plaid. He leans it against the fireside chair, and continues his search. The dialogue continues uninterrupted.]

DONALD: Do you be running out, mother, and seeing if you can keep them away, until I'm after finding my knife. Is that them coming ?

ELSPETH: No, no. Look you, it is only Maggie. But do you be quick, and I'll hold them back as long as I can.

[Re-enter MAGGIE. She places her milk jug on the table, and sits in ELSPETH's chair, strategically guarding the muffled musket.]

DONALD: I was not expecting you. . . . (To ELSPETH) Be quick, now, the two of you !

[He hustles them out, and speaks to MAGGIE, still searching round the room as he does so.]

Where now have you come from ?

MAGGIE: I've juist been down to Morag's to borrow this wee drap milk. Och, I'm fair wabbit !

DONALD (*suspicious*): It is not often you would be saying the like of that. What is it that's come to you ?

MAGGIE: Nothing has come to me, except keepin' hoose for a feckless Hielander that canna even mind hi ain promises. . . . What are ye looking for the noo ?

DONALD: It is my knife that I'm after losing.

MAGGIE: Ye'll no find it here. I've juist seen it oot in the byre.

DONALD: You did not then, for I had it since I was there. Come out of that chair now, while I look and see if it is there.

MAGGIE: There's no need, I tell ye. It's oot in the byre.

DONALD: But I'm wanting my plaid.

MAGGIE: You'll no' need your plaid to be goin' to the byre.

DONALD: Come out of that chair, I'm saying.

MAGGIE: I'm no' comin' oot of the chair while you stand there dootin' your ain wife's word. I've tell't ye, I've juist seen your knife in the byre, and I'm stayin' here till you've been to find it.

DONALD: Is it the truth you're telling me?

MAGGIE: It is that. It's on the shelf ahint the door o' the byre.

DONALD: Well, it's a strange thing how it could come there, but I'll go there to pleasure you. I will be back for my plaid in a minute.

*[He runs out. MAGGIE at once drops her assumed tiredness, jumps up and unwraps the musket. She goes to the water-pitcher which SHEELAGH has brought back, but finds it empty. Looking round in perplexity, she sees the milk jug. She takes it up, and pours milk down the barrel of the musket, and then the remainder over its touch-hole. Voices are heard outside. She hastily rewraps the musket, and leans it against the chair again. The voices grow more distinct.]*

BOSWELL (*offstage*): Sir, you have said so already. If I could persuade you to listen more patiently . . .

THE DOCTOR (*offstage*): Sir, I will listen more patiently when you have something more valuable to tell me.

*[He looms up in the doorway, followed by BOSWELL and ELSPETH.]*

You promised to show me a Druidical Temple, and you conduct me to see some lumps of stone, and a great deal of damp heather.

BOSWELL: But surely, sir, when all the Antiquaries in Scotland are agreed that . . .

DOCTOR: Sir, there are no Antiquaries in Scotland! I am beginning to doubt if there were ever any Druids. Druids worshipped trees, and their cult flourished in England because our trees are many and venerable. Judging by what I have seen in Scotland, the religion would perish for want of objects to worship.

BOSWELL: Sir, you are becoming the victim of your own prejudices. You yourself admired our old trees at Cawdor.

[MAGGIE is standing with her back to the fire. THE DOCTOR and BOSWELL are quarrelling by the table.]

DOCTOR: I am the victim of nothing, sir, except your foolish persistence! We are a long way from Cawdor and I have not seen a tree in forty miles. You would be better employed in apologizing to these good people for our intrusion.

[He turns to ELSPETH, who has been looking first at the plaid, then out of the door for DONALD.]

Madam, my friend tells me that you might not resent the visit of an English traveller who has come to see your country. I am sorry if we disturb you with our bickerings.

ELSPETH (her mind still on DONALD): Och, ay! There's my son's wife there will be glad to see you. She is from Lothian and understands the English.

[She returns to the door, as THE DOCTOR bows to MAGGIE.]

DOCTOR: Madam, I trust we do not come at an inconvenient season. I am somewhat out of breath after climbing your hill on a fool's errand. I would be glad of a moment's rest under your roof.

MAGGIE: Sit ye down then. It's a wee bit hill when you're no' used to it.

[THE DOCTOR sits on a stool, and BOSWELL on his left. ELSPETH has now sighted DONALD and made a sign of enquiry to him offstage. She comes into the room, takes up the plaid and musket, and carries them to the door. Here she gives them to DONALD, who immediately disappears. She watches him out of sight. None of this business interrupts the dialogue. Indeed, no one notices it except MAGGIE.]

DOCTOR: It is indeed, madam, and I am not as young as you. I was further hampered by the loss of my good oak stick, which has been stolen from me.

BOSWELL: Come, come, sir, you know very well it is not stolen. I believe Joseph has it in his pack. You must have better evidence before scattering such accusations of dishonesty about the country.



DOCTOR : Sir, I have no need of evidence. I know the stick was stolen, and there's an end on't. Consider, sir, the value of such a piece of timber in this locality.

BOSWELL (*to MAGGIE*) : My friend will have it, madam, that we are a nation of thieves. I brought him to Scotland to show him his mistake.

MAGGIE : Aweel, maybe you were no' juist wise to bring him to the Hielands.

ELSPETH (*coming back to her chair*) : It is from Lothian that she comes, look you, and she doesna understand the ways of Highland folk. . . . Maggie, if the gentleman is tired, maybe he'd like a drop of that milk you're after borrowing.

MAGGIE : Aweel, I'm feared he canna hae that. There isna enough to offer him.

*[She takes the empty jug into the inner room, re-appears, and stands looking out of the door.]*

BOSWELL : Pray do not trouble yourselves. We did not come here to drink your milk. I brought my friend in the hope of showing him something of our Highland peasantry, and perhaps providing him with material for an essay. I hope you will not think the theme unworthy of your commendation, Dr. Johnson. It is from such cottages as this that the clansmen marched to join Prince Charles's standards.

DOCTOR : If that is so, then it is I who am unworthy of the theme. I do not know that the men who died at Culloden need any other commendation.

ELSPETH (*hearing at last a word that she understands*) : And what is Culloden to you that you would be talking about it ?

DOCTOR : Madam, it means a great deal to me. Culloden did not only see the defeat of your countrymen. It saw the end of many things which even an Englishman may regret.

ELSPETH : I do not understand what you would be saying. There were few Englishmen that joined with the Prince, and he marching to Derby. But maybe you would be one of the few.

DOCTOR : Madam, when the Prince marched to Derby, I was a youngster starving in a London slum. If I had had the



money to leave King George's capital and join King George's enemies, I might well have done so—and I might well have fallen at Falkirk. Even an English soldier could hardly miss such a target as I present.

*[He indicates his ample contours. MAGGIE comes behind the table to shift her cooking things.]*

ELSPETH: Och, ay. It's easy talking now. It isna much you would be risking after thirty years.

BOSWELL: Come, come, woman, you must not taunt Dr. Johnson with cowardice. I can assure you . . .

DOCTOR: Sir, you can assure her of nothing. The rebuke was more than justified. I have the grace to know when I am caught boasting of imaginary achievements. I may wish I had marched with Prince Charles, but I did not do so, and there's an end on't !

*[He turns to MAGGIE.]*

I must apologize for my friend, madam. He seems determined to provoke me to-day.

MAGGIE: Och, there's no need, the puir laddie. But will ye tell me why he calls you Doctor ?

DOCTOR: I am a Doctor, ma'am. I have that distinction.

MAGGIE: Aweel, maybe ye'd juist cast an ee on oor coo. She's gey puirly the day, and sick coos are nae sae different frae sick people.

DOCTOR: I am sorry, madam, but if you were sick yourself, I should not venture to prescribe for you.

MAGGIE: And what way then would they call you a doctor ?

DOCTOR: That, madam, is a question that I sometimes ask myself. I must confess that I cannot always find a satisfactory answer.

BOSWELL: Most people, sir, would call your Dictionary a more than satisfactory answer.

DOCTOR: Possibly. But a dictionary is little use when a neighbour's cow is sick. You must not make me ridiculous to your Highlanders by praising me for accomplishments that have no value outside London.

BOSWELL: We might call upon Joseph, sir. He has some skill as a horse-leech.

DOCTOR: Bozzy, that is the first useful observation you have made to-day. Joseph shall make up for his master's deficiencies.

[*He turns to MAGGIE.*]

Madam, if you care to sample our servant's skill, you have only to lead the . . . er, patient down to the roadside.

MAGGIE (*rising to go*): Weel, maybe it's worth the trying, if . . .

[*A shot is heard in the distance. She runs to the window.*]

What's that? . . . Mother, do you know what that would be?

ELSPETH: I might that, but it isna you that need to be troubling yourself.

BOSWELL: Come, come, woman, my servant is waiting by the roadside. . . . (*To THE DOCTOR*) . . . Shall we attend the consultation?

DOCTOR: You may do as you please, sir. I think I will rest here a little longer . . . if this lady can put up with a Jacobite who omitted to fight at Culloden.

[*BOSWELL conducts MAGGIE to the door, points JOSEPH out to her and watches her go.*]

ELSPETH: They are saying that we have a long memory for things in the Highlands, but I am thinking it is you English who cannot forget Culloden.

DOCTOR: Madam, our consciences forbid us to forget it. I can pardon my countrymen for preferring King George to a Papist. I can even pardon them for running away from the Highlanders at Prestonpans. But when they had defeated those same Highlanders, outnumbered, famished, and desperately weary, I can find no excuse for the way in which they used their victory. They called you savages, and then practised on you cruelties at which a Turkish Bashaw might well blush. There are Englishmen who are still praying to be forgiven for what was done in our names after Culloden.

BOSWELL (*returning to behind the table*): It pleases Dr. Johnson to call himself a Jacobite, and there are times when his

romantical notions induce him to forget that he now enjoys a pension from King George.

ELSPETH: But it is a traveller he is now?

DOCTOR: Yes, madam. I trust you did not think I had come as King George's spy.

ELSPETH: I did not then. But I was thinking, if it's a traveller you are, maybe you'd be glad of a keepsake. It is something that would put you in mind of Culloden whenever you cared to be looking at it.

DOCTOR: Well, madam, and what is this keepsake?

ELSPETH: It is there under your hand.

[THE DOCTOR *takes up* DONALD's bonnet, on which his hand was resting on the table.

DOCTOR: You are surely not referring to this cap?

BOSWELL: Bonnet, sir, bonnet. (*Aside.*)

ELSPETH: I 'am that.

DOCTOR (*rising and examining it*): I am surprised to hear it. I should certainly not have supposed this . . . er . . . (*he glares at BOSWELL*) . . . cap . . . to be thirty years old.

ELSPETH: It is the way we would be spinning and dyeing it here, so that it would never fade at all.

DOCTOR: The darn in the crown seems recent.

ELSPETH (*floored, but only for a moment*): And why would it not be darned, and it riddled with the English bullets?

BOSWELL (*taking the bonnet from THE DOCTOR*): English bullets? Then it must indeed have been worn at Culloden. Dr. Johnson, here is a find for us! What will they say in London, when we show them a bonnet that was actually worn by one of Prince Charles's clansmen?

ELSPETH: But I'm thinking . . .

BOSWELL: Be easy, madam. We would not think of taking it from you without ample compensation.

ELSPETH: I wasna begging that you should take it for nothing.

DOCTOR: But I cannot allow . . .

BOSWELL: Nay, sir, you must give way to me. It was I that brought you here.

*[He produces his purse.]*

I cannot let you filch this from me.

DOCTOR: Nay, sir, I am glad to be left out of this.

*[He walks up to the window.]*

BOSWELL: Well, ma'am, I'm a poor man, but not, I hope, a niggardly one. Would you consider a guinea to be a fair price?

ELSPETH: I would rather be leaving the price of it to you. It's a poor widow I am, and it's little money I've seen since my man was buried.

BOSWELL: A widow? Am I to understand that this relic once belonged to your husband? It must be doubly precious.

*[He places a second guinea on the table.]*

ELSPETH: And supposing it were not he at all that would be wearing the bonnet at Culloden? Supposing it was another and a greater, that would be leaving it here, and he slipping out of that door? Maybe the red-coats were so close upon him that he hadna time to cover his head, for all that there was a price of thirty thousand pounds upon it.

BOSWELL (*with bated breath*): Thirty thousand pounds? There was only one man on whose head they put so much as that. Are you telling us that he sheltered under this very roof?

ELSPETH: There were roofs that were humbler than ours, and he glad of them to shelter him from his enemies.

BOSWELL (*laying a third guinea on the table and turning up to the DOCTOR*): Sir, we have seen some fine buildings in Scotland, and many famous ones. It seems that chance has brought us to one that deserves fame as much as any.

DOCTOR: Sir, it may please you to think so. But the day is far spent, and it is time we were proceeding. Do you go ahead now, and see if Joseph has sustained his reputation



as a horse-leech. . . . No, sir, you shall not wait for me. I shall follow at my leisure.

*[He pushes BOSWELL out and turns back to ELSPETH, who is gathering up the guineas. The light outside is beginning to fade.]*

Madam . . .

ELSPETH: What is it you are wanting?

DOCTOR: I am hoping for an explanation.

ELSPETH: And what like would that be?

DOCTOR: I think you know. I have just watched you bubble my friend out of a considerable sum of money. I ought, perhaps, to have prevented the fraud. I am sure it is my duty now to insist that you return me the guineas.

ELSPETH: I do not understand what you would be saying.

DOCTOR: I do not know how to be plainer with you. You know that you have cheated my friend, and cheated him by methods which the meanest of us might scorn to use.

There are certain things which, I was told, are peculiarly sacred in the Highlands. There are others which are sacred to the whole human family. You have not scrupled to put them to an unworthy use. I have some experience of life, and I am hoping that you did so under the pressure of some extraordinary need. I trust that you were not merely influenced by a few worthless guineas.

ELSPETH: And maybe you will tell me what that same "worthless" may mean. "I am a poor man," says your friend, and he laying gold on the table that would pay our rent for five years or maybe seven. Little enough did it mean to him, but it is the only thing that can keep us here in the land of our fathers. You may be talking of cheating if you will, but what is there we have no right to be doing, rather than be sold into slavery for want of the siller?

DOCTOR: I am not sure that I understand you. I am a stranger, and in my short visit to Scotland, I have seen more prosperity than I expected, and heard fewer complaints.

ELSPETH: It is not many complaints that you would be hearing, and you visiting with Lairds and Chieftains. It is



not they that would be telling you of the sorrows of their own people, when they themselves would be driving us over the seas, to make room for their sheep.

DOCTOR: I know nothing of this, madam. My friend Boswell put a very different colour on this question of the Emigrations.

ELSPETH: Maybe he told you it was by our own will we'd be going, and we living in the glen before ever there was a King of England. I'm thinking your friend is a laird, and forbye he's more of a Londoner than a Scotsman. His head will be too full of books and such-like trash to be heeding what is happening in the Highlands.

DOCTOR (*after a pause*): Madam, I came to Scotland to see curiosities, and study the customs of a strange land. I am learning from you that Society differs little under different skies. It seems that the poor are everywhere oppressed, and the rich unconscious that they themselves are the oppressors. . . . I think I could have learnt as much without quitting my lodgings in London, or my home in Lichfield. . . .

*[He moves towards the door.]*

I shall endeavour to pass on the lesson you have taught me to those whose hospitality I am enjoying.

ELSPETH: You may do as it pleases you, but if they canna hear the cries of their own people, it's little heed they'll be paying to what's said to them by a Dictionary from London. . . . Do you be going now, and finding your friend by the roadside.

*[Re-enter DONALD, dejectedly.]*

Is it done, Donald, is it done?

DONALD: It is not then. There were two men with him, and . . .

*[He throws away the musket, crosses to the fire, and sits down in an attitude of dejection.]*

ELSPETH: Since when have you been frightened of three men, and you with a musket that I was after loading for you myself?

DONALD: Ay, and it's ill work you made of the loading. There was never a bullet would come out of it the day, and me pulling the trigger like a mad one.

ELSPETH: But we heard the shot of it from this house. Maggie was hearing it too, and she . . .

DONALD: You heard nothing at all except Himself and a keeper shooting rabbits by the loch. Och, it's disgraced I am !

DOCTOR: Do I take it, sir, that you went out for bigger game than a rabbit ?

ELSPETH: Ay, it was a deer that's been eating our corn this long while. He's after missing him with the gun.

*[Re-enter BOSWELL, obviously pleased about something, and keeping his hands behind his back.]*

BOSWELL: Come, Doctor Johnson, we are waiting for you. Whatever have you been doing all this while ?

DOCTOR: Sir, I stayed behind to administer a lesson, and I found myself more pupil than master.

BOSWELL: I am glad to find you in such tractable mood, sir, for your lessons are not ended yet. I have brought you another . . . from Joseph's pack-saddle.

*[He produces a heavy oak walking-stick.]*

DOCTOR: Sir, I may accept correction from the simple and unpretending, but I shall certainly not tolerate it from you.

BOSWELL (*giving him his stick, and falling "on guard" with his own*): There, sir, I am not afraid of you. We'll soon see which is the best man.

*[THE DOCTOR is about to fall in with his schoolboy mood by beginning the fight, when DONALD springs up at them in anger.]*

DONALD: And who are you that you would be quarrelling in my house, and you with no right in it at all ? Be gone with you now and take your Dominie with you, before I put a bullet in the guts of him.

*[He catches up the musket and points it at them.]*

BOSWELL: Put that thing down ! Put it down, I tell you ! I shall report you for concealing firearms.

[*As he speaks, re-enter MAGGIE. She crosses to DONALD at a run.*

MAGGIE: Och, Donald ! Dinna be sic a fule ! (*Struggling with him*) Ye ken braw ye wouldna shoot the Doctor, when his man's juist cured oor coo.

BOSWELL: I am sorry to have exposed you to this, Doctor Johnson.

DOCTOR: Sir, you have exposed me to nothing. I happen to know the weapon is innocuous.

[DONALD abandons the struggle and MAGGIE takes the musket from him.

BOSWELL: After all I told you of Highland courtesy, I am ashamed . . .

DOCTOR: Sir, I am more concerned with these good folks' opinion of the courtesy of Londoners. Let us at least show them that we know when we are no longer wanted.

BOSWELL: But, sir, I must at least . . .

DOCTOR: Sir, there are no "buts" about it. You have your keepsake and I have my lesson. It is time we were going. (*To MAGGIE*) Madam, my felicitations on your cow's recovery. (*To DONALD*) Sir, I would hope to make your acquaintance when you are more in the mood for conversation. (*To ELSPETH*) Madam, I will wish you a long residence in this . . . er, historic house. (*Joining BOSWELL outside the door*) To horse, Bozzy, to horse !

"Lo, where my steed, impatient, paws the track,  
And longs to feel my bulk oppress her back."

[*His voice dies away outside the door.*

ELSPETH (*quietly to DONALD*): I'm thinking you mustna lose heart, Donald. You can try again to-morrow.

DONALD: I doubt I cannot do that, and I in no mood for it at all. It was in a fine rage I was the day, and I doubt it will not be coming back upon me.

ELSPETH: Well, I'll just be putting this by, in case you're feeling that way again.

*[She takes up the musket, and goes into the inner room.]*

MAGGIE: Sae I wasna sae wrang after a'. It's a musket you'd pay the rent wi'.

DONALD: It is that, when Archie Morrison would be coming to ask it. And maybe it was you that put a spell upon it, so that I could not kill him. It's you that would have us all shamed before we go for slaves to America. Sheep-runs in the glen of my fathers, and the clansmen working in chains across the water. That is what is coming to Scotland, since they took the claymores away from us. It is a sorrowful thing I'm saying, but we must bear what isna in our power to change. You had best be packing the things now. It's the morn or the morn's morn that we must be going.

ELSPETH (*who has re-entered, carrying a lamp*): It is a strange thing that my own son should be talking that way, and we not leaving the glen at all.

DONALD: Not leaving the glen? And maybe you can tell me what I'll be saying to Archie Morrison, and he coming up here for the rent.

ELSPETH: I can that. "Archie Morrison," you will be saying, "is it change for a guinea that you happen to have about you? For my mother," you will be saying, "my mother was dreaming of gold last night, and this evening it's her dream that's come true."

*[She rolls the three guineas out on to the table. The other two pounce upon them.]*

*[She goes to fetch the spinning-wheel from the corner.]*

DONALD: Guineas?

MAGGIE: Ay, it's guineas they are. I've seen the like in Edinburgh.

DONALD: Ay, but you havena seen the like of Archie's face when we give him one of them, and he asking for the rent.

MAGGIE: We're rich, Donald, we're rich! There's enough here to pay the rent for five years and mair! We might buy anither coo, and maybe a pig into the bargain.

DONALD: We could that. I'll be going to market to-morrow. Where will my other brogues be? I'll be wanting to mend them to-night.

MAGGIE (*turning to ELSPETH*): An' what Hielan' trick hae ye been playing to get the like of these frae the Englishmen?

ELSPETH: I'm thinking now that I will not be telling you that, for it isna proud of it I am.

DONALD: What is it you'd be wanting to spin for to-night, mother?

ELSPETH: I'm thinking I'll make you a new bonnet, instead of darning the old one.

MAGGIE (*starting on the bannocks again*): Was it the big man that gave you the guineas, or the wee sparrow in breeches?

ELSPETH: It was the little one. I would not be taking siller from the other.

DONALD (*sitting down to mend his brogues*): And why would you not be doing that, mother?

ELSPETH: Well, the little one was a fool, maybe, and they are saying that a fool and his siller are soon parted. But the big one . . .

[*Her work claims all her attention for a moment.*]

MAGGIE: I thocht the big yin was as muckle a fule as the tither.

ELSPETH (*having finished what was holding her up*): And I'm thinking it's wrong you are. He was not a fool at all. He was just clean daft.

CURTAIN



Robert McLellan

THE CHANGELING

*A Border Comedy*

FOR MR. JOHN B. RUSSELL

CHARACTERS

ARCHIE ARMSTRONG

KATE – his wife

JEAN – his aunt

JOCK ELLIOT – known as THE LAIRD'S JOCK

ROBBIE ELLIOT

TAM ELLIOT

The action takes place in Archie Armstrong's cot-house on the Stubholm Brae, below the junction of the waters of Wauchope and Esk, in the Debatable Land.

TIME: About 1600.

*The play was first produced by MR. BERNARD KELLY, at THE LITTLE THEATRE, CLYDEBANK, in January, 1935.*

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SCENE: *The kitchen of ARCHIE ARMSTRONG'S cot-house. In the middle of the back wall is a crude hearth of unhewn stone. To the right of this is a small doorway leading to an inner room, and to the left are a wooden bucket, a heather besom and a pile of logs. In the right wall is a low doorway which opens on the brae-side. In both right and left walls is a small shuttered window. There are a few wooden seats and a wooden cradle.*

*When the curtain rises KATE ARMSTRONG and JEAN, her husband's aunt, are sitting by the hearth. KATE is a woman of about twenty-eight. JEAN is very old. It is after nightfall, and the kitchen is lit, dimly and weirdly, partly by the fire and partly by a cruisie.*

KATE: He's a lang time i' comin'.

JEAN: Eh?

KATE: He's a lang time i' comin'.

JEAN: Ay.

KATE: It's gey bricht, ootbye, wi' the mune. I hope he isna catchit.

JEAN: Catchit? Wha?

KATE: Airchie.

JEAN: Oor Airchie winna be catchit.

KATE: I wish I was shair o't. I canna forget that dream I had last nicht.

JEAN: Eh?

KATE: I canna forget that dream I had. I hope the bairn's a' richt. It cam into the dream tae, puir wee thing.

JEAN: The bairn?

KATE: Ay. I hope it's a' richt.

JEAN: Ye may weill say. I woner ye let it oot o' yer haunds. Yer sister Bell's a fushionless craitur.

KATE: Ay, whiles she is.

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The play is published by Messrs. Faber and Faber, at 1s. net.

JEAN: I wonder ye let her tak it awa, and it no lang aff the breist.

KATE: She wad hae it for a day or twa. It was a notion she had, puir craitur, and her wi' nae bairns o' her ain.

JEAN: Eh?

KATE: I was sayin' she had nae bairns o' her ain.

JEAN: Oh ay. Na.

KATE: But she'll look weill efter the bairn. I dinna fear for it sae muckle. It's Airchie I'm worryin' aboot mair.

JEAN: Airchie'll be a' richt. It'll tak a gey when o' the Elliots to catch oor Airchie.

KATE: He's late, though. It's gey quait.

JEAN: Quait?

KATE: Ay.

JEAN: It's quaiter nor it used to be hereabouts on a mune-licht nicht. I mind whan I was a bit lassie, afore the grand-faither o' the praisint King hangit Johnnie Airmstrang o' Gilnockie and a' his best men. The haill o' the Watter wad be oot reivin' in thae days, and the weemen-folk ower at Gilnockie waitin'. We used to sit at a big fire in the yaird and talk a' through the nicht. We were a gey cheerie lot whiles.

KATE: And yer men awa reivin', and likely to be killed?

JEAN: Oh we were worrit sometimes tae, but we aye tried to keep oor hairts up, and thocht o' what the men wad bring hame. There were kye aye by the hunders, and my faither used to bring me fine lace bannets and gowden bracelets, and a' sorts o' bonnie nick-nacks. But it's chinged days sin Johnnie o' Gilnockie was hangit, and my faither alang wi' him. It's a yowe here noo, and a coo there, and gey aften naething at a'. The Airmstrangs arena what they used to be.

KATE: It maun hae been awfu' for yer mither whan her man was hangit.

JEAN: Eh?

KATE: It maun hae been awfu' for yer mither whan her man 'was hangit.

JEAN: Oh ay. Ay, it was a sair, sair day for her.

KATE: I hope it winna happen to Airchie, Jean, for I dreamt last nicht he was hangit.

JEAN: Na na, oor Airchie winna be hangit. He's ower clever for that. Dreams gang by the contrar, my hinny.

KATE: I hope sae. But wheesht ! What was that ?

JEAN: Eh ?

KATE: Did ye no hear a whistle ?

JEAN: Me ? Na.

KATE: It was like a whaup, and whaups dinna steer for naething at this time o' the nicht !

JEAN: Eh ?

KATE: There it's again !

JEAN: What's wrang ?

KATE: Wheesht ! I hear something. (*Going to the window, right, and looking through a chink in the shutter*) I can see naething bye the ordinar. Ooh ! There's someane comin' to the door ! (*She stands by the door.*) Oh, I hope it's Airchie ! (*Someone knocks softly.*) Wha's there ? Speak !

ARCHIE: It's me.

KATE: Oh thank the Lord.

[*She makes to open the door.*]

ARCHIE: Dinna open the noo ! Cover the licht !

KATE: Eh ?

ARCHIE: Cover the licht.

KATE: Cover the licht wi' the bowl, Jean. Staun in front o' the fire.

JEAN: Eh ?

KATE: Staun in front o' the fire, I'm tellin' ye !

[*The kitchen is darkened. The door opens and moonlight streams in. ARCHIE enters. A thud is heard.*]

KATE: What's that ?



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ARCHIE: It's a yowe. Shut the door. Is it shut?

KATE: Ay.

ARCHIE: A' richt, we'll hae the licht again. (*The light is restored.*) By God I'm wabbit. I hae cairrit it a' the wey frae the Brockwuid, wi' the mune sae clear that I had to keep to the trees and the daurk corners. (*Going to the cradle with the sheep, which is rolled in a sack*) Is there watter in that bucket?

KATE: Ay, but what's wrang? Were ye seen?

ARCHIE: I was guttin' the beast at the Brockwuid Burn whan Will Elliot's Robbie cam alang. He gied a roar like a bull whan he saw me, and gaed aff like a warlock in the wind.

KATE: Wad he see it was ye?

ARCHIE: I dinna ken, but they hae missed the yowe, for whan I cam awa I could hear shouts gaun ower the braes in a' airts.

[*He is removing the sheep from the sack.*]

KATE: And ye brocht the beast here! Oh Airchie, man, they'll be in efter ye. Ye'll be hangit the morn. Could ye no hae laid the beast ootbye?

ARCHIE: A guid yowe! See here, wumman, help me wi' the claes oot o' the creddle.

KATE: The claes oot o' the creddle!

ARCHIE: Ay, the claes oot o' the creddle. My haunds are a' bluid.

KATE: But what for dae ye want the claes?

ARCHIE: For the yowe, wumman. It's oor ae chance. We'll hap it weill up and cover the horns. Jean!

JEAN: Eh?

ARCHIE: Gae to the window and keek through the shutter. Tell me gin ye see a move.

JEAN: A' richt.

ARCHIE: Come on noo, Kate, wi' the bairn's claes.

KATE: Oh Airchie Airmstrang, are ye fair gaen gyte? Could ye no hae left the beast ootbye? Oh man, tak it awa yet. Throw it ower the back window there, to the hole

ablow the Linn. Dinna keep it here, man. Dinna keep it here.

ARCHIE: See here, row it up, will ye. I'll hae to wash mysell and clean aff a' the bluid. (*He starts to wash his hands in the bucket.*) Come on, see, wumman. Dinna staun there gapin'.

KATE: But they'll fin it, Airchie. They'll fin it. Throw it oot whan ye're telt.

ARCHIE: Oh wumman, wumman, will I hae to dae it mysell? They'll be here afore I'm through wi't. Row it up in the claes and hap it up, see, wi' juist the een keekin' oot. They'll neir jalouse it isna the bairn.

KATE: Oh Airchie Airmstrang, what a thing to say! A deid yowe like yer ain bairn! Ye're hairtless.

ARCHIE: Look here see, are ye gaun to help me or are ye no? Ye'll hae me catchit, I'm tellin' ye, gin ye dinna dae what ye're askit. Dae ye want to feenish me?

JEAN: There's something movin' down by the Watter, Airchie!

ARCHIE: Eh! Oh Kate, stert see! Quick! (*KATE starts to put the sheep into the cradle.*) I'll hae to hide my jerkin and brogans. Tell me if it comes ony nearer, Jean.

JEAN: Eh? Ay.

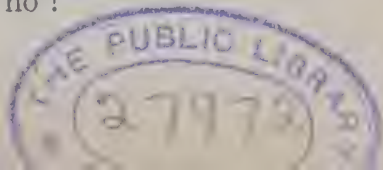
KATE: It winna dae. It winna dae at a'. See here, if ye winna throw it ower the Linn I'll dae it mysell! (*She moves to the window with the sheep.*)

ARCHIE: Oh Kate wumman, stop, see, stop! If ye open that shutter whan the licht's in ye'll hae them down on us this meenit.

KATE: Let the licht be covered, then, for it's gaun ower the window!

ARCHIE (*who has dried his hands*): Come back, see! Come back! Tak yer haunds aff that beast. Dae ye hear? Tak yer haunds aff that beast or I'll fell ye to the grun!

KATE: Oh ye'll fell me to the grun, will ye! Ye'll fell me to the grun! Oh Airchie Airmstrang, I'll gang hame to my mither the morn gin they hang ye or no!



ARCHIE: Ay, greet. Greet. That'll help. (*He starts to put the sheep into the cradle.*) Gae ower to the window, see, and keep watch. Jean!

JEAN: Eh?

ARCHIE: Is it ony nearer?

JEAN: What?

ARCHIE: Whateir ye saw.

JEAN: Oh that. I think it maun hae been the licht o' the mune on the Watter.

ARCHIE: Tach, wumman, ye're doitit. Let Kate tak the window noo, and gae ye but the hoose and fetch me my ither brogans, and tak thae watt anes wi' ye, and this jerkin, and put them weill in at the back o' the press.

[*KATE is at the window, sobbing.*]

JEAN: Eh?

ARCHIE: Put them weill in at the back o' the press! (*Wiping his knife*) And see, put that knife wi' them. Hide it weill.

JEAN: Ay.

ARCHIE: Mind then.

[*Exit JEAN.*]

Noo keep a guid watch. Dae ye see ocht yet?

KATE: I see a' sorts o' things.

ARCHIE: Ach, ye're useless. But that yowe's weill happit. Noo I'll hae to throw oot this watter and thae bits o' clouts. Is there anyane aboot?

KATE: There's a licht movin'!

ARCHIE: Whaur?

KATE: Across the Watter!

ARCHIE: Let me see. God, wumman, ye're a stippit ane. Wha'd cairry a licht and the nicht sae clear? There's nae licht that I see. A's quait and still. Cover the licht again, till I throw oot this watter.

[*KATE covers the light. ARCHIE opens the shutter of the back window. Moonlight streams into the room and the noise of a waterfall is heard. ARCHIE is seen to throw out the water from the bucket and several pieces of sacking. The shutter is closed and the light restored.*]

ARCHIE: Noo back to the window wi' ye. I'll put the bucket at the fire to dry. And I'll gie the flair a bit soop wi' the besom.

*[He removes the traces of blood from the floor.]*

*Enter JEAN. She startles KATE.*

KATE: Oh mercy me, what a fricht ye gied me !

ARCHIE: Wumman, ye're a bundle o' nerves. Keep lookin' oot, will ye. Gie me the brogans, Jean. We'll put them here. *(He puts the dry brogans beside the fire.)* Noo awa til yer bed.

JEAN: My bed !

ARCHIE: Ay. It's ower late for the like o' ye to be up.

JEAN: I wantit to see what wad happen.

ARCHIE: Awa til yer bed whan ye're telt ! *(Exit JEAN.)* Noo that's everythin', I think. The bucket'll sune be dry. Is everythin' quait ?

KATE: I think sae.

ARCHIE: Huh, ye think sae. Come ower to the creddle, see, and sit wi' yer back to the door, and gin they come ye'll stert rockin' it, see, and speakin' saft. See there, it's wee Jock to the life.

KATE: What a thing to say. It's mair like the Deil.

ARCHIE: Sit down, then. Sit down.

KATE: What's that ! Oh what's that !

ARCHIE: The nicher o' a horse !

KATE: Futesteps !

ARCHIE: Ay !

*[He hurriedly places the bucket beside the logs.]*

KATE: Look oot !

ARCHIE: Na na ! There micht be someane lookin' in ! Keep sittin' weill ower the creddle, noo, and talkin' awa as if the bairn was in it ! I'll sit here by the fire.

KATE: Oh Airchie, Airchie, I'm frichtent ! Listen to them !

*[Various sounds indicate that a party of men, some of them with horses, is just outside.]*

ARCHIE: Talk to the bairn, wumman ! 'Talk to the bairn !

KATE: Oh my wee lamb. My wee lamb.

ARCHIE: Oh my God, wumman, dinna ca' it a lamb ! Think o' something else !

[*The sounds outside continue. THE LAIRD'S JOCK is heard issuing orders. "Sim, gae ye roun the back, but watch ye dinna fa' ower. Rab and Will, tak ye a side the piece. The rest o' ye staun there except Robbie and Tam. Noo watch weill, ye anes."*]

KATE: My wee pet. My wee pet. Are the men comin' to hang yer faither ?

ARCHIE: Dinna talk about hangin', wumman !

[*THE LAIRD'S JOCK hammers at the door. KATE moans.*]

JOCK: Open the door, there !

ARCHIE (*fairly loudly*): Wha's that ? What's wrang ? (*In a hoarse whisper*) Talk to the bairn, wumman ! (*More loudly again*) It's a queer time o' the nicht for this sort o' cairry on.

[*He opens the door.*]

JOCK: We hae gotten ye, then !

ARCHIE: What i' the Deil's name's wrang wi' ye a' ?

JOCK: Ye'll sune fin that oot, my man ! Staun back !

[*KATE moans.*]

ARCHIE: See here, Jock, ye nicht quaiten doun a wee. There's nae need to bowf the rufe aff. The bairn here's at daith's door, and the wife's fair dementit. What's the maitter that ye're here the nicht ?

[*JOCK has pushed his way into the kitchen. TAM follows. They are booted and spurred and wear corselets and steel-caps. ROBBIE stands by the door, which is left open. He is a mere youth, very stupid looking, and dressed, like ARCHIE, in breeches and shirt. He wears no stockings, however, and is bare-footed.*]

JOCK: I'll sune tell ye what's the maitter. Yer bairn's at daith's door, is it, and yer wife's fair dementit ? She'll be waur sune, Airchie man, she'll be waur sune, for ye'll hae the craws at yer een the morn as shair as ye're the biggest



leear on the Borders. Whaur's that yowe ye hae stolen frae my faither's fauld ?

[KATE *moans*.

ARCHIE: Yowe ? Frae yer faither's fauld ? Man, Jock, ye're makin' a fule o' yersell the nicht. And ye micht speak low and no frichten the wife, for she has enugh to worry her the noo wi' the bairn seik, withoot the like o' ye comin' in and shoutin' the hoose down. What's this aboot a yowe ?

JOCK: Ask Robbie here. He'll tell ye.

ARCHIE: Him ! He's hauf-wittit.

ROBBIE: Hauf-wittit yersell ! I saw ye at the Brockwuid fauld the nicht.

ARCHIE: No sae lood. No sae lood. Ye saw me at the Brockwuid fauld, did ye ? Weill, I haena been ower the door a' nicht, sae ye're a leear.

ROBBIE: I'm nae sic thing.

ARCHIE: Stop yer shoutin' then, and hae some respect for my wife and bairn.

JOCK: Ah, yer wife and bairn. Whaur's that yowe ?

ARCHIE: See here, Jock, I said I had nae yowe, and I want the hoose quait. If ye think there's a yowe here ye can look for it, though I'm tellin' ye ye winna fin as muckle as a trotter. Whan ye hae dune lookin', clear oot o' here and leave us in peace, for the bairn's faur gaen, and this isna giein' it the ghaist o' a chance.

JOCK: Richt then, we'll look. We'll look, a' richt. And nae tricks, mind, for I hae men a' roun the hoose.

ARCHIE: Hurry and be dune wi't, then, and tak yersells oot o' here.

[JOCK and TAM make a thorough search of the kitchen. TAM's search carries him to the vicinity of the cradle. He stumbles clumsily.

KATE: Oh my wee pet. My wee pet.

ARCHIE: See here, Tam, if ye're gaun to look ower there try to be a bit quaiter. There's nae need for ye to kick everything ower. Gie the bairn a chance.

TAM: Ay ay, a' richt.

[JOCK and TAM find nothing, and become puzzled.

JOCK: Ye hae been gey smert this time, Airchie.

ARCHIE: Ye're a damnt fule, Jock.

JOCK: We hae but the hoose to look yet.

ARCHIE: Ye'll fin naething there bune the auld ane in her bed.

JOCK: And the yowe in ahint her, likely. Come on, Tam. We'll look the ither end noo.

[JOCK and TAM leave the kitchen. ARCHIE follows to the door. JEAN is heard screaming. KATE moans, and listens intently to what goes on. Whenever the men in the room raise their voices, she whimpers with fear.

JEAN: What are ye wantin'? Mercy me, ye arena blate, mairchin' straucht intil a room and an auld wumman in it in her bed! What are ye wantin'? There's naething here.

JOCK: We'll mak shair. Come on, rise up see, and staun oot o' the wey.

JEAN: Jock Elliot, dae ye ken what ye're sayin'?

JOCK: Rise up and staun oot o' the wey!

JEAN: I neir heard o' the like o' this in a' my born days!

ARCHIE: Let them hae their ain wey, Jean. The're juist makin' fules o' themsells.

JOCK: Haud yer tongues, the pair o' ye, see. Is there naething there, Tam?

TAM: Na.

JOCK: That's queer. Look ablow the bed again. Tak everything oot. What's that? Na. There's the ither bed, though. Tak a guid look. The press there. Look weill, noo. Gae back til yer bed, auld wife. We're dune wi't.

JEAN: Eh?

JOCK: Gae back til yer bed!

JEAN: Thank ye.

JOCK: Nae impudence, noo. Nae impudence.

ARCHIE: No sae lood. No sae lood.

JOCK: Oh haud yer tongue. Ony sign o't yet, Tam?

TAM: Na.

JOCK: That's queer. Hae ye tried that corner o' the thack?

TAM: Ay. There's naething there.

JOCK: That's queer, ye ken. Gey.

[*They return to the kitchen.*]

ARCHIE: Weill, there ye are. I telt ye ye were wastin' yer time.

JOCK: What hae ye dune wi't? Hae ye hidden it somewhere ootbye?

ARCHIE: I tell ye, man, I haena seen yer yowe. I haena been ower the door a' nicht.

JOCK: Whaur are yer brogans?

ARCHIE: Ower there at the fire.

[*JOCK examines ARCHIE's dry brogans. He is puzzled.*]

JOCK: There's something gey queer aboot this.

ARCHIE: Ah, queer. If it was Will's Robbie there that says he saw me there's naething queer aboot it. The laddie isna richt i' the heid.

JOCK: Are ye shair ye saw Airchie at the Brockwuid, Robbie?

ROBBIE: Ay, I saw him!

ARCHIE: Dinna shout, then. Dinna shout.

JOCK: Ye're positive?

ROBBIE: Ay, I'm positive.

JOCK: Ye wad sweir to't?

ROBBIE: Ay, I wad sweir to't.

[*KATE moans.*]

JOCK: Dae ye hear that, Airchie? He says he wad sweir to't. He believes he saw ye, onyway.

ARCHIE: He didna. He couldna. I haena been ower the door.

JOCK (*sarcastically*): Ye didna tak the yowe?

ARCHIE: Na, I'm tellin' ye.

JOCK: Wad ye sweir to't ?

ARCHIE (*with great solemnity*): See here, Jock, I'll gie ye my solemn aith. Gin eir I laid a haund on a yowe o' yer faither's may the guid Lord abune mak me eat the flaish that's in that very creddle.

JOCK (*impressed*): That's solemn eneugh. Eh, Tam ?

TAM: By God ay.

JOCK: What hae ye gotten to say noo, Robbie ? Dae ye still sweir that ye saw him ?

ROBBIE: I dinna ken.

ARCHIE: There ye are.

ROBBIE: I thocht I saw him.

JOCK: Ah, thocht.

TAM: Huh.

ROBBIE: I saw something.

JOCK: Ye said it was Airchie.

ROBBIE: It was like Airchie.

JOCK: Like. Ye didna say that. Ye said it was him.

ROBBIE: I thocht it was him.

JOCK: Huh.

ARCHIE: I ken what ye hae seen, Robbie. They say Maggie Broun has an ill-will at ye. Weill, she has an ill-will at me tae.

TAM: And what about it ?

ARCHIE: She's a witch.

TAM: She's nae witch !

ARCHIE: She is, and she's bewitched Robbie into thinkin' he saw me. That's what's happened.

TAM: Wha telt ye Maggie Broun was a witch ?

ARCHIE: Weill, if ye dinna believe that. What wad ye say yersell, Jock ?

JOCK: I wad say she was, but of coorse I dinna ken. It's juist what I hae heard.

ROBBIE: I wad say she was a witch.

TAM: Ah ye ! Ye wad say onything.

ARCHIE: She has a hare-shotten lip, Tam. Ye canna deny that.

ROBBIE: And she has lang shairp teeth like the fangs o' a dug. And lang peyntit finger-nails.

TAM: Awa see! Wha telt ye that ? That's the daft-like wey they talk about her, and she's a hairmless auld body. She's my wife's auntie.

ARCHIE: Juist that. Sae ye uphaud her. But she has a hare-shotten lip, for a' that. Has she no, noo, Jock ?

JOCK: Oh there's nae doobt about that.

ROBBIE: And there's nae doobt but her teeth are like fangs, for I hae seen them. She chased me ae day whan I was a laddie for tyin' a stane to her cat's tail, and she bared them at me like a dug.

TAM: Ah !

JOCK: Oh there's nae doobt, Tam, but she's a queer ane, yer wife's auntie or no, for they say queer things about her. And hoo dae ye accoot for Robbie seein' Airchie the nicht, if ye say she had nae haund in it ?

ARCHIE: Ay ?

TAM: Oh I dinna ken that.

JOCK: Na, ye dinna ken that. There ye are, ye see.

TAM: Ah weill.

JOCK: Weill what ? Ye say she has an ill-will at ye, Airchie ?

ARCHIE: She has that, for I gied her cat a kick mysell the ither day, for comin spittin' at me. She skrecht at me like ane dementit, and cursed like an auld randy. It wasna cannie.

JOCK: I hae heard she's a bad ane.

ROBBIE: A bad ane ! I'll tell ye something ! It was afore she cam here frae Carlisle. They say she was chased oot o' the place. There was a man ca'd Dick o' the Coo. A Gordon. She bewitched his wean !



JOCK: Bewitched his wean?

[KATE *moans*.

ROBBIE: Ay.

TAM: Wha telt ye that?

ROBBIE: I'll tell ye wha telt me. It was the reiver they hangit in Peebles last year for murderin' a wee lassie at Talla Linn.

[KATE *moans*.

JOCK: I ken the ane.

ROBBIE: Ay. He telt me aboot Maggie Broun twa year syne, ae day in Suport.

TAM: And what did he tell ye? Lees, I'll wager.

ARCHIE: Quaiter, though. Quaiter.

ROBBIE: It wasna lees, for what wey was she chased oot o' Carlisle? Tell me that.

TAM: Oh I dinna ken. It's juist the queer look she has.

ROBBIE: There ye are. She looks queer. There ye are.

JOCK: But hoo did she bewitch Dick o' the Coo's wean?

ROBBIE: I'll tell ye. It was ae nicht i' the gloamin' at the back end o' the year. Dick was ootbye, and his wife was a' her lane wi' the bairn. She had lain it to sleep i' the creddle afore it grew daurk, and stertit to mak bannocks, and whan the bakin' was ower she sat down on a stule at the fire for a rest, withoot lichtin' the cruisie. Noo the creddle was there, see, whaur yer ain is, Airchie.

[ARCHIE *begins to look uncomfortable*. KATE *moans*.

ROBBIE: And the fire was ower there, juist whaur yer ain is tae.

JOCK: Weill?

ROBBIE: Noo she noddit for a while, and whan she waukent it was gey near daurk, and the fire was down, and she felt frichtent o' something, something ower juist whaur the creddle was. She was sittin' here, see, and the creddle was there.

[*He points*. KATE *moans*.

JOCK: Ay weill, come on.

ROBBIE: Weill, she was sae sair frichtent she sat for a while as still as daith, syne she ups, wi' her hairt dingin', and lichts the cruiseie.

JOCK: Ay?

ROBBIE: Syne she gangs ower to the creddle.

TAM: Ay?

ARCHIE (*impatiently*): Ay, come on, feenish it.

ROBBIE: She gangs ower to the creddle.

TAM: Ay?

ROBBIE: And the bairn isna there!

ARCHIE: Eh!

JOCK: Isna there?

KATE: Oh my wee pet!

ROBBIE: Na, but the creddle isna toom!

JOCK: Isna toom?

ROBBIE: Na, for the Deil's in it!

[KATE *moans*.

JOCK: The Deil!

TAM: Eh!

[ARCHIE *lifts a stick from beside the fireplace, ready to fight in case of discovery*.

ROBBIE: Ay, the Deil, turnt into a bairn!

[KATE *moans*.

JOCK: Turnt into a bairn?

ROBBIE: Ay, but the queerest eir ye saw! Bad-lookin'!

TAM: Eh!

ROBBIE: A wee bad-lookin' craitur wi' a raw o' grinnin' teeth!

[KATE *moans*.

ROBBIE: And horns!

JOCK: Horns?

KATE: Oh my wee Jock ! My wee Jock !

ROBBIE: Ay, horns !

TAM: Godsake !

ROBBIE: And queer big bulgin' een !

KATE (*wildly*): Oh ! Ooooooh ! Oh !

JOCK: There's shairly something gey faur wrang wi' yer wife, Airchie ? Quait, Robbie, the noo.

ARCHIE: It's the bairn, ye see. We shouldna be here makin' a noise. It's gey faur gaen and she's upset. She's been like this a' nicht. (*He goes to her and comforts her.*) Wheesht, wumman, they'll be quait noo. They winna be lang. Ye'd mebbe better leave, Jock.

JOCK: I daursay. I didna believe the bairn was badly, ye ken. I thocht ye were juist sayin' it to gar us leave ye alane.

ARCHIE: Na, it's badly a' richt, puir wee thing.

JOCK: Ay, it looks it. It's een are gey queer.

[KATE *moans*.

ARCHIE: Ay, they're badly swallt.

[JOCK *moves closer to the cradle in his curiosity to see the child.*

KATE *stares at him, and her eyes widen with fear. She leans over the cradle to prevent him from discovering the sheep.*

JOCK: They are that.

ARCHIE: Staun back, man ! Staun back !

[KATE *screams, then falls into a dead faint, and as she does so clutches wildly with her hands, catching the piece of cloth which conceals the sheep's horns. The whole head is exposed. Jock leaps back abruptly, raising his hands. His eyes stare in sheer horror.*

JOCK: Look !

[TAM *stares too, backing to the door.*

TAM: Horns !

JOCK: Ooooooh !

ROBBIE: Aaaaaooooohw !

[ROBBIE flees at once. JOCK and TAM stare in fascinated horror for a second more. ARCHIE kneels by his wife.

JOCK: The Deil !

TAM: Rin, man, rin !

[He too rushes outside.

JOCK (*following*): Ooooooh !

[Outside there arises a medley of sounds : shouts of fear, questions, orders, the padding of feet and the stamping of horses.

JOCK: My horse ! My horse ! Sim ! My horse ! For God's sake ! Sim ! What's wrang ? Here ! Here !

TAM: Mak the Watter ! The Watter's the thing !

ROBBIE: Aaaaaooooh !

[JEAN enters from the bedroom, clad heavily from top to toe in weird bed-garments.

JEAN: What's happened, Airchie ? What's happened ? Did they fin ye oot ? Oh what's wrang wi' her ?

ARCHIE: She fentit wi' fricht, silly wumman.

JEAN: Did they fin ye oot ?

ARCHIE: Na. Quait, she's comin' roun'.

[KATE slowly opens her eyes, raises her head, and looks round.

KATE: Are they awa, Airchie ?

ARCHIE: Ay ay, they're awa, lass.

KATE: Oh thank the Lord.

CURTAIN





Lord Dunsany

A NIGHT AT AN INN

*A Play*

## CHARACTERS

A. E. SCOTT-FORTESCUE (THE TOFF) – a dilapidated gentleman  
WILLIAM JONES (BILL) }  
ALBERT THOMAS } merchant sailors  
JACOB SMITH (SNIGGERS) }  
FIRST PRIEST OF KLESH  
SECOND PRIEST OF KLESH  
THIRD PRIEST OF KLESH  
KLESH

*This play was first performed on April 22nd, 1916, at THE NEIGHBORHOOD PLAYHOUSE, NEW YORK.*

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*The curtain rises on a room in an inn. SNIGGERS and BILL are talking, THE TOFF is reading a paper. ALBERT sits a little apart.*

SNIGGERS: What's his idea, I wonder?

BILL: I don't know.

SNIGGERS: And how much longer will he keep us here?

BILL: We've been here three days.

SNIGGERS: And 'aven't seen a soul.

BILL: And a pretty penny it cost us when he rented the pub.

SNIGGERS: 'Ow long did 'e rent the pub for?

BILL: You never know with him.

SNIGGERS: It's lonely enough.

BILL: 'Ow long did you rent the pub for, Toffy?

*[THE TOFF continues to read a sporting paper; he takes no notice of what is said.]*

SNIGGERS: 'E's *such* a toff.

BILL: Yet 'e's clever, no mistake.

SNIGGERS: Those clever ones are the beggars to make a muddle. Their plans are clever enough, but they don't work, and then they make a mess of things much worse than you or me.

BILL: Ah!

SNIGGERS: I don't like this place.

BILL: Why not?

SNIGGERS: I don't like the looks of it.

BILL: He's keeping us here because here those niggers can't find us. The three heathen priests what was looking for us so. But we want to go and sell our ruby soon.

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The play is published by Messrs. Putnam & Co., Ltd., 42 Great Russell Street, London, W.C.1, at 1s. net.

ALBERT: There's no sense in it.

BILL: Why not, Albert?

ALBERT: Because I gave those black devils the slip in Hull.

BILL: You give 'em the slip, Albert?

ALBERT: The slip, all three of them. The fellows with the gold spots on their foreheads. I had the ruby then and I give them the slip in Hull.

BILL: How did you do it, Albert?

ALBERT: I had the ruby and they were following me . . .

BILL: Who told them you had the ruby? You didn't show it.

ALBERT: No. . . . But they kind of know.

SNIGGERS: They kind of know, Albert?

ALBERT: Yes, they know if you've got it. Well, they sort of mouched after me, and I tells a policeman and he says, O, they were only three poor niggers and they wouldn't hurt me. Ugh! When I thought of what they did in Malta to poor old Jim.

BILL: Yes, and to George in Bombay before we started.

SNIGGERS: Ugh!

BILL: Why didn't you give 'em in charge?

ALBERT: What about the ruby, Bill?

BILL: Ah!

ALBERT: Well, I did better than that. I walks up and down through Hull. I walks slow enough. And then I turns a corner and I runs. I never sees a corner but I turns it. But sometimes I let a corner pass just to fool them. I twists about like a hare. Then I sits down and waits. No priests.

SNIGGERS: What?

ALBERT: No heathen black devils with gold spots on their face. I give 'em the slip.

BILL: Well done, Albert!

SNIGGERS (*after a sigh of content*): Why didn't you tell us?

ALBERT: 'Cause 'e won't let you speak. 'E's got 'is plans and 'e thinks we're silly folk. Things must be done 'is way.

And all the time I've give 'em the slip. Might 'ave 'ad one o' them crooked knives in him before now but for me who give 'em the slip in Hull.

BILL: Well done, Albert! Do you hear that, Toffy? Albert has give 'em the slip.

THE TOFF: Yes, I hear.

SNIGGERS: Well, what do you say to that?

THE TOFF: Oh! . . . Well done, Albert!

ALBERT: And what a' you going to do?

THE TOFF: Going to wait.

ALBERT: Don't seem to know what 'e's waiting for.

SNIGGERS: It's a nasty place.

ALBERT: It's getting silly, Bill. Our money's gone and we want to sell the ruby. Let's get on to a town.

BILL: But 'e won't come.

ALBERT: Then we'll leave him.

SNIGGERS: We'll be all right if we keep away from Hull.

ALBERT: We'll go to London.

BILL: But 'e must 'ave 'is share.

SNIGGERS: All right. Only let's go. (*To THE TOFF*) We're going, do you hear? Give us the ruby.

THE TOFF: Certainly.

*[He gives them a ruby from his waistcoat pocket; it is the size of a small hen's egg. He goes on reading his paper.]*

ALBERT: Come on, Sniggers.

*[Exeunt ALBERT and SNIGGERS.]*

BILL: Good-bye, old man. We'll give you your fair share, but there's nothing to do here—no girls, no halls, and we must sell the ruby.

THE TOFF: I'm not a fool, Bill.

BILL: No, no, of course not. Of course you ain't, and you've helped us a lot. Good-bye. You'll say good-bye?

THE TOFF: Oh, yes. Good-bye.



*[Still reads his paper. Exit BILL. THE TOFF puts a revolver on the table beside him and goes on with his papers. After a moment the three men come rushing in again, frightened.]*

SNIGGERS (*out of breath*): We've come back, Toffy.

THE TOFF: So you have.

ALBERT: Toffy. . . . How did they get here?

THE TOFF: They walked, of course.

ALBERT: But it's eighty miles.

SNIGGERS: Did you know they were here, Toffy?

THE TOFF: Expected them about now.

ALBERT: Eighty miles!

BILL: Toffy, old man . . . what are we to do?

THE TOFF: Ask Albert.

BILL: If they can do things like this, there's no one can save us but you, Toffy. . . . I always knew you were a clever one. We won't be fools any more. We'll obey you, Toffy.

THE TOFF: You're brave enough and strong enough. There isn't many that would steal a ruby eye out of an idol's head, and such an idol as that was to look at, and on such a night. You're brave enough, Bill. But you're all three of you fools. Jim would have none of my plans, and where's Jim? And George. What did they do to him?

SNIGGERS: Don't, Toffy!

THE TOFF: Well, then, your strength is no use to you. You want cleverness; or they'll have you the way they had George and Jim.

ALL: Ugh!

THE TOFF: Those black priests would follow you round the world in circles. Year after year, till they got the idol's eye. And if we died with it, they'd follow our grandchildren. That fool thinks he can escape from men like that by running round three streets in the town of Hull.

ALBERT: God's truth, *you* 'aven't escaped them, because they're 'ere.

THE TOFF: So I supposed.

ALBERT: You *supposed* !

THE TOFF: Yes, I believe there's no announcement in the Society papers. But I took this country seat especially to receive them. There's plenty of room if you dig, it is pleasantly situated, and, what is more important, it is in a very quiet neighbourhood. So I am at home to them this afternoon.

BILL: Well, *you're* a deep one.

THE TOFF: And remember, you've only my wits between you and death, and don't put your futile plans against those of an educated gentleman.

ALBERT: If you're a gentleman, why don't you go about among gentlemen instead of the likes of us ?

THE TOFF: Because I was too clever for them as I am too clever for you.

ALBERT: Too clever for them ?

THE TOFF: I never lost a game of cards in my life.

BILL: You never lost a game ?

THE TOFF: Not when there was money in it.

BILL: Well, well !

THE TOFF: Have a game of poker ?

ALL: No, thanks.

THE TOFF: Then do as you're told.

BILL: All right, Toffy.

SNIGGERS: I saw something just then. Hadn't we better draw the curtains ?

THE TOFF: No.

SNIGGERS: What ?

THE TOFF: Don't draw the curtains.

SNIGGERS: Oh, all right.

BILL: But, Toffy, they can see us. One doesn't let the enemy do that. I don't see why . . .

THE TOFF: No, of course you don't.

BILL: Oh, all right, Toffy.

*[All begin to pull out revolvers.]*

THE TOFF (*putting his own away*): No revolvers, please.

ALBERT: Why not?

THE TOFF: Because I don't want any noise at my party. We might get guests that hadn't been invited. *Knives* are a different matter.

*[All draw knives. THE TOFF signs to them not to draw them yet. TOFFY has already taken back his ruby.]*

BILL: I think they're coming, Toffy.

THE TOFF: Not yet.

ALBERT: When will they come?

THE TOFF: When I am quite ready to receive them. Not before.

SNIGGERS: I should like to get this over.

THE TOFF: Should you? Then we'll have them now.

SNIGGERS: Now?

THE TOFF: Yes. Listen to me. You shall do as you see me do. You will all pretend to go out. I'll show you how. I've got the ruby. When they see me alone they will come for their idol's eye.

BILL: How can they tell like this which of us has it?

THE TOFF: I confess I don't know, but they seem to.

SNIGGERS: What will you do when they come in?

THE TOFF: I shall do nothing.

SNIGGERS: What?

THE TOFF: They will creep up behind me. Then, my friends, Sniggers and Bill and Albert, who gave them the slip, will do what they can.

BILL: All right, Toffy. Trust us.

THE TOFF: If you're a little slow, you will see enacted the cheerful spectacle that accompanied the demise of Jim.

SNIGGERS: Don't, Toffy. We'll be there, all right.

THE TOFF: Very well. Now watch me.

*[He goes past the windows to the inner door R. He opens it inwards, then, under cover of the open door, he slips down on his knee and closes it, remaining on the inside, appearing to have gone out. He signs to the others, who understand. Then he appears to re-enter in the same manner.]*

THE TOFF: Now, I shall sit with my back to the door. You go out one by one, so far as our friends can make out. Crouch very low to be on the safe side. They mustn't see you through the window.

*[BILL makes his sham exit.]*

THE TOFF: Remember, no revolvers. The police are, I believe, proverbially inquisitive.

*[The other two follow BILL. All three are now crouching inside the door R. THE TOFF puts the ruby beside him on the table. He lights a cigarette. The door at the back opens so slowly that you can hardly say at what moment it began. THE TOFF picks up his paper. A native of India wriggles along the floor ever so slowly, seeking cover from chairs. He moves L., where THE TOFF is. The three sailors are R. SNIGGERS and ALBERT lean forward. BILL's arm keeps them back. An armchair had better conceal them from the Indian. The black PRIEST nears THE TOFF. BILL watches to see if any more are coming. Then he leaps forward alone—he has taken his boots off—and knifes the PRIEST. The PRIEST tries to shout, but BILL's left hand is over his mouth. THE TOFF continues to read his sporting paper. He never looks around.]*

BILL (*sotto voce*): There's only one, Toffy. What shall we do?

THE TOFF (*without turning his head*): Only one?

BILL: Yes.

THE TOFF: Wait a moment. Let me think. (*Still apparently absorbed in his paper*) Ah, yes. You go back, Bill. We must attract another guest. . . . Now, are you ready?

BILL: Yes.

THE TOFF: All right. You shall now see my demise at my Yorkshire residence. You must receive guests for me.

*[He leaps up in full view of the window, flings up both arms and falls to the floor near the dead PRIEST.]*

Now, be ready.

*[His eyes close. There is a long pause. Again the door opens, very, very slowly. Another PRIEST creeps in. He has three golden spots upon his forehead. He looks round, then he creeps up to his companion and turns him over and looks inside of his clenched hands. Then he looks at the recumbent TOFF. Then he creeps towards him. BILL slips after him and knifes him like the other with his left hand over his mouth.]*

BILL (*sotto voce*): We've only got two, Toffy.

THE TOFF: Still another.

BILL: What'll we do?

THE TOFF (*sitting up*): Hum.

BILL: This is the best way, much.

THE TOFF: Out of the question. Never play the same game twice.

BILL: Why not, Toffy?

THE TOFF: Doesn't work if you do.

BILL: Well?

THE TOFF: I have it, Albert. You will now walk into the room. I showed you how to do it.

ALBERT: Yes.

THE TOFF: Just run over here and have a fight at this window with these two men.

ALBERT: But they're . . .

THE TOFF: Yes, they're dead, my perspicuous Albert. But Bill and I are going to resuscitate them. . . . Come on.

*[BILL picks up a body under the arms.]*

THE TOFF: That's right, Bill. (*Does the same.*) Come and help us, Sniggers. . . . (*SNIGGERS comes.*) Keep low, keep low. Wave their arms about, Sniggers. Don't show yourself. Now, Albert, over you go. Our Albert is slain. Back you get,



BILL. Back, Sniggers. Still, Albert. Mustn't move when he comes. Not a muscle.

*[A face appears at the window and stays for some time. Then the door opens and, looking craftily round, the third PRIEST enters. He looks at his companions' bodies and turns round. He suspects something. He takes up one of the knives and with a knife in each hand he puts his back to the wall. He looks to the left and right.]*

THE TOFF: Come on, Bill.

*[The PRIEST rushes to the door. THE TOFF knifes the last PRIEST from behind.]*

THE TOFF: A good day's work, my friends.

BILL: Well done, Toffy. Oh, you are a deep one!

ALBERT: A deep one if ever there was one.

SNIGGERS: There ain't any more, Bill, are there?

THE TOFF: No more in the world, my friend.

BILL: Aye, that's all there are. There were only three in the temple. Three priests and their beastly idol.

ALBERT: What is it worth, Toffy? Is it worth a thousand pounds?

THE TOFF: It's worth all they've got in the shop. Worth just whatever we like to ask for it.

ALBERT: Then we're millionaires now.

THE TOFF: Yes, and, what is more important, we no longer have any heirs.

BILL: We'll have to sell it now.

ALBERT: That won't be easy. It's a pity it isn't small, and we had half a dozen. Hadn't the idol any other on him?

BILL: No, he was green jade all over and only had this one eye. He had it in the middle of his forehead and was a long sight uglier than anything else in the world.

SNIGGERS: I'm sure we ought all to be very grateful to Toffy.

BILL: And, indeed, we ought.

ALBERT: If it hadn't been for him . . .

BILL: Yes, if it hadn't been for old Toffy . . .

SNIGGERS: He's a deep one.

THE TOFF: Well, you see I just have a knack of foreseeing things.

SNIGGERS: I should think you did.

BILL: Why, I don't suppose anything happens that our Toff doesn't foresee. Does it, Toffy?

THE TOFF: Well, I don't think it does, Bill. I don't think it often does.

BILL: Life is no more than just a game of cards to our old Toff.

THE TOFF: Well, we've taken these fellows' tricks.

SNIGGERS (*going to the window*): It wouldn't do for anyone to see them.

THE TOFF: Oh, nobody will come this way. We're all alone on a moor.

BILL: Where will we put them?

THE TOFF: Bury them in the cellar, but there's no hurry.

BILL: And what then, Toffy?

THE TOFF: Why, then we'll go to London and upset the ruby business. We have really come through this job very nicely.

BILL: I think the first thing that we ought to do is to give a little supper to old Toffy. We'll bury these fellows to-night.

ALBERT: Yes, let's.

SNIGGERS: The very thing!

BILL: And we'll all drink his health.

ALBERT: Good old Toffy!

SNIGGERS: He ought to have been a general or a premier.

[*They get bottles from cupboard, etc.*]

THE TOFF: Well, we've earned our bit of a supper.

[*They sit down.*]

BILL (*glass in hand*): Here's to old Toffy, who guessed everything!

ALBERT *and* SNIGGERS: Good old Toffy !

BILL: Toffy, who saved our lives and made our fortunes.

ALBERT *and* SNIGGERS: Hear ! Hear !

THE TOFF: And here's to Bill, who saved me twice to-night.

BILL: Couldn't have done it but for your cleverness, Toffy.

SNIGGERS: Hear, hear ! Hear, hear !

ALBERT: He foresees everything.

BILL: A speech, Toffy. A speech from our general.

ALL: Yes, a speech.

SNIGGERS: A speech.

THE TOFF: Well, get me some water. This whisky's too much for my head, and I must keep it clear till our friends are safe in the cellar.

BILL: Water ? Yes, of course. Get him some water, Sniggers.

SNIGGERS: We don't use water here. Where shall I get it ?

BILL: Outside in the garden.

[*Exit* SNIGGERS.

ALBERT: Here's to the future !

BILL: Here's to Albert Thomas, Esquire.

ALBERT: And William Jones, Esquire.

[*Re-enter* SNIGGERS, *terrified*.

THE TOFF: Hullo, here's Jacob Smith, Esquire, J.P., *alias* Sniggers, back again.

SNIGGERS: Toffy, I've been thinking about my share in that ruby. I don't want it, Toffy ; I don't want it.

THE TOFF: Nonsense, Sniggers. Nonsense.

SNIGGERS: You shall have it, Toffy, you shall have it yourself, only say Sniggers has no share in this 'ere ruby. Say it, Toffy, say it !

BILL: Want to turn informer, Sniggers ?

SNIGGERS: No, no. Only I don't want the ruby, Toffy. . . .

THE TOFF: No more nonsense, Sniggers. We're all in together in this. If one hangs, we all hang; but they won't outwit me. Besides, it's not a hanging affair, they had their knives.

SNIGGERS: Toffy, Toffy, I always treated you fair, Toffy. I was always one to say, "Give Toffy a chance." Take back my share, Toffy.

THE TOFF: What's the matter? What are you driving at?

SNIGGERS: Take it back, Toffy.

THE TOFF: Answer me, what are you up to?

SNIGGERS: I don't want my share any more.

BILL: Have you seen the police?

[ALBERT pulls out his knife.

THE TOFF: No, no knives, Albert.

ALBERT: What then?

THE TOFF: The honest truth in open court, barring the ruby. We were attacked.

SNIGGERS: There's no police.

THE TOFF: Well, then, what's the matter?

BILL: Out with it.

SNIGGERS: I swear to God . . .

ALBERT: Well?

THE TOFF: Don't interrupt.

SNIGGERS: I swear I saw something *what I didn't like*.

THE TOFF: What you didn't like?

SNIGGERS (*in tears*): Oh, Toffy, Toffy, take it back. Take my share. Say you take it.

THE TOFF: What has he seen?

[*Dead silence, only broken by SNIGGERS' sobs. Then steps are heard. Enter a hideous idol. It is blind and gropes its way. It gropes*

*its way to the ruby and picks it up and screws it into a socket in the forehead. SNIGGERS still weeps softly, the rest stare in horror. The idol steps out, not groping. Its steps move off, then stop.*

THE TOFF: O, great heavens !

ALBERT (*in a childish, plaintive voice*): What is it, Toffy ?

BILL: Albert, it is that obscene idol (*in a whisper*) come from India.

ALBERT: It is gone.

BILL: It has taken its eye.

SNIGGERS: We are saved.

A VOICE OFF (*with outlandish accent*): Meestaire William Jones, Able Seaman.

[THE TOFF *has never spoken, never moved. He only gazes stupidly in horror.*

BILL: Albert, Albert, what is this ?

[*He rises and walks out. One moan is heard. SNIGGERS goes to the window. He falls back sickly.*

ALBERT (*in a whisper*): What has happened ?

SNIGGERS: I have seen it. I have seen it. Oh, I have seen it !

[*He returns to table.*

THE TOFF (*laying his hand very gently on SNIGGERS' arm, speaking softly and winningly*): What was it, Sniggers ?

SNIGGERS: I have seen it.

ALBERT: What ?

SNIGGERS: Oh !

VOICE: Meestaire Albert Thomas, Able Seaman.

ALBERT: Must I go, Toffy ? Toffy, must I go ?

SNIGGERS (*clutching him*): Don't move.

ALBERT (*going*): Toffy, Toffy.

[*Exit.*

VOICE: Meestaire Jacob Smith, Able Seaman.



SNIGGERS: I can't go, Toffy, I can't go. I can't do it.

[*He goes.*

VOICE: Meestaire Arnold Everett Scott-Fortescue, late Esquire, Able Seaman.

THE TOFF: I did not foresee it.

[*Exit.*

CURTAIN

Lady Gregory

THE WORKHOUSE WARD

*A Play*

## CHARACTERS

MIKE MCINERNEY	}	paupers
MICHAEL MISKELL		
MRS. DONOHOE — a countrywoman		

SCENE: *A ward in Cloon Workhouse. The two old men in their beds.*

MICHAEL MISKELL: Isn't it a hard case, Mike McInerney, myself and yourself to be left here in the bed, and it the feast day of Saint Colman, and the rest of the ward attending on the Mass.

MIKE MCINERNEY: Is it sitting up by the hearth you are wishful to be, Michael Miskell, with cold in the shoulders and with speckled shins? Let you rise up so, and you well able to do it, not like myself that has pains the same as tin-tacks within in my inside.

MICHAEL MISKELL: If you have pains within in your inside there is no one can see it or know of it the way they can see my own knees that are swelled up with the rheumatism, and my hands that are twisted in ridges the same as an old cabbage stalk. It is easy to be talking about soreness and about pains, and they maybe not to be in it at all.

MIKE MCINERNEY: To open me and to analyse me you would know what sort of a pain and a soreness I have in my heart and in my chest. But I'm not one like yourself to be cursing and praying and tormenting the time the nuns are at hand, thinking to get a bigger share than myself of the nourishment and of the milk.

MICHAEL MISKELL: That's the way you do be picking at me and faulting me. I had a share and a good share in my early time, and it's well you know that, and the both of us reared in Skehanagh.

MIKE MCINERNEY: You may say that, indeed, we are both of us reared in Skehanagh. Little wonder you to have good nourishment the time we were both rising, and you bringing away my rabbits out of the snare.

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The play is published by Messrs. Putnam & Co., Ltd., 42 Great Russell Street, London, W.C.1, at 1s. net.

MICHAEL MISKELL: And you didn't bring away my own eels, I suppose, I was after spearing in the Turlough? Selling them to the nuns in the convent you did, and letting on they to be your own. For you were always a cheater and a schemer, grabbing every earthly thing for your own profit.

MIKE MCINERNEY: And you were no grabber yourself, I suppose, till your land and all you had grabbed wore away from you!

MICHAEL MISKELL: If I lost it itself, it was through the crosses I met with and I going through the world. I never was a Rambler and a card-player like yourself, Mike McInerney, that ran through all and lavished it unknown to your mother!

MIKE MCINERNEY: Lavished it, is it? And if I did was it you yourself led me to lavish it or some other one? It is on my own floor I would be to-day and in the face of my family, but for the misfortune I had to be put with a bad next door neighbour that was yourself. What way did my means go from me is it? Spending on fencing, spending on walls, making up gates, putting up doors, that would keep your hens and your ducks from coming in through starvation on my floor, and every four-footed beast you had from preying and trespassing on my oats and my mangolds and my little lock of hay!

MICHAEL MISKELL: O to listen to you! And I striving to please you and to be kind to you and to close my ears to the abuse you would be calling and letting out of your mouth. To trespass on your crops is it? It's little temptation there was for my poor beasts to ask to cross the mering. My God Almighty! What had you but a little corner of a field!

MIKE MCINERNEY: And what do you say to my garden that your two pigs had destroyed on me the year of the big tree being knocked, and they making gaps in the wall.

MICHAEL MISKELL: Ah, there does be a great deal of gaps knocked in a twelvemonth. Why wouldn't they be knocked by the thunder, the same as the tree, or some storm that came up from the west?

MIKE MCINERNEY: It was the west wind, I suppose that devoured my green cabbage? And that rooted up my



Champion potatoes? And that ate the gooseberries themselves from off the bush?

MICHAEL MISKELL: What are you saying? The two quietest pigs ever I had, no way wicked and well ringed. They were not ten minutes in it. It would be hard for them eat strawberries in that time, let alone gooseberries that's full of thorns.

MIKE MCINERNEY: They were not quiet, but very ravenous pigs you had that time, as active as a fox they were, killing my young ducks. Once they had blood tasted you couldn't stop them.

MICHAEL MISKELL: And what happened myself the fair day of Esserkelly, the time I was passing your door? Two brazened dogs that rushed out and took a piece of me. I never was the better of it or of the start I got, but wasting from then till now!

MIKE MCINERNEY: Thinking you were a wild beast they did, that had made his escape out of the travelling show, with the red eyes of you and the ugly face of you, and the two crooked legs of you that wouldn't hardly stop a pig in a gap. Sure any dog that had any life in it at all would be roused and stirred seeing the like of you going the road!

MICHAEL MISKELL: I did well taking out a summons against you that time. It is a great wonder you not to have been bound over through your lifetime, but the laws of England is queer.

MIKE MCINERNEY: What ailed me that I did not summons yourself after you stealing away the clutch of eggs I had in the barrel, and I away in Ardahan searching out a clucking hen.

MICHAEL MISKELL: To steal your eggs is it? Is that what you are saying now? (*Holds up his hands.*) The Lord is in heaven, and Peter and the saints, and yourself that was in Ardahan that day put a hand on them as soon as myself! Isn't it a bad story for me to be wearing out my days beside you the same as a spancelled goat. Chained I am and tethered I am to a man that is ramsacking his mind for lies!

MIKE MCINERNEY: If it is a bad story for you, Michael Miskell, it is a worse story again for myself. A Miskell to be

next and near me through the whole of the four quarters of the year. I never heard there to be any great name on the Miskells as there was on my own race and name.

MICHAEL MISKELL: You didn't, is it? Well, you could hear it if you had but ears to hear it. Go across to Lisheen Crannagh and down to the sea and to Newtown Lynch and the mills of Duras and you'll find a Miskell, and as far as Dublin!

MIKE MCINERNEY: What signifies Crannagh and the mills of Duras? Look at all my own generations that are buried at the Seven Churches. And how many generations of the Miskells are buried in it? Answer me that!

MICHAEL MISKELL: I tell you but for the wheat that was to be sowed there would be more side cars and more common cars at my father's funeral (God rest his soul!) than at any funeral ever left your own door. And as to my mother, she was a Cuffe from Claregalway, and it's she had the purer blood!

MIKE MCINERNEY: And what do you say to the banshee? Isn't she apt to have knowledge of the ancient race? Was ever she heard to screech or to cry for the Miskells? Or for the Cuffles from Claregalway? She was not, but for the six families, the Hyneses, the Foxes, the Faheys, the Dooleys, the McInerneys. It is of the nature of the McInerneys she is I am thinking, crying them the same as a king's children.

MICHAEL MISKELL: It is a pity the banshee not to be crying for yourself at this minute, and giving you a warning to quit your lies and your chat and your arguing and your contrary ways; for there is no one under the rising sun could stand you. I tell you you are not behaving as in the presence of the Lord!

MIKE MCINERNEY: Is it wishful for my death you are? Let it come and meet me now and welcome so long as it will part me from yourself! And I say, and I would kiss the book on it, I to have one request only to be granted, and I leaving it in my will, it is what I would request, nine furrows of the field, nine ridges of the hills, nine waves of the ocean to be put between your grave and my own grave the time we will be laid in the ground!

MICHAEL MISKELL: Amen to that ! Nine ridges, is it ? No, but let the whole ridge of the world separate us till the Day of Judgment ! I would not be laid anear you at the Seven Churches, I to get Ireland without a divide !

MIKE MCINERNEY: And after that again ! I'd sooner than ten pound in my hand, I to know that my shadow and my ghost will not be knocking about with your shadow and your ghost, and the both of us waiting our time. I'd sooner be delayed in Purgatory ! Now, have you anything to say ?

MICHAEL MISKELL: I have everything to say, if I had but the time to say it !

MIKE MCINERNEY (*sitting up*): Let me up out of this till I'll choke you !

MICHAEL MISKELL: You scolding pauper you !

MIKE MCINERNEY (*shaking his fist at him*): Wait a while !

MICHAEL MISKELL (*shaking his fist*): Wait a while yourself !

[MRS. DONOHOE comes in with a parcel. She is a country-woman with a frilled cap and a shawl. She stands still a minute. The two old men lie down and compose themselves.]

MRS. DONOHOE: They bade me come up here by the stair. I never was in this place at all. I don't know am I right. Which now of the two of ye is Mike McInerney ?

MIKE MCINERNEY: Who is it is calling me by my name ?

MRS. DONOHOE: Sure amn't I your sister, Honor McInerney that was, that is now Honor Donohoe.

MIKE MCINERNEY: So you are, I believe. I didn't know you till you pushed anear me. It is time indeed for you to come see me, and I in this place five year or more. Thinking me to be no credit to you, I suppose, among that tribe of the Donohoes. I wonder they to give you leave to come ask am I living yet or dead ?

MRS. DONOHOE: Ah, sure, I buried the whole string of them. Himself was the last to go. (*Wipes her eyes.*) The Lord be praised he got a fine natural death. Sure we must go through our crosses. And he got a lovely funeral ; it would delight you to hear the priest reading the Mass. My poor John Donohoe ! A nice clean man, you couldn't but be

fond of him. Very severe on the tobacco he was, but he wouldn't touch the drink.

MIKE MCINERNEY: And is it in Curranroe you are living yet?

MRS. DONOHOE: It is so. He left all to myself. But it is a lonesome thing the head of a house to have died!

MIKE MCINERNEY: I hope that he has left you a nice way of living?

MRS. DONOHOE: Fair enough, fair enough. A wide lovely house I have; a few acres of grass land . . . the grass does be very sweet that grows among the stones. And as to the sea, there is something from it every day of the year, a handful of periwinkles to make kitchen, or cockles maybe. There is many a thing in the sea is not decent, but cockles is fit to put before the Lord!

MIKE MCINERNEY: You have all that! And you without ere a man in the house?

MRS. DONOHOE: It is what I am thinking, yourself might come and keep me company. It is no credit to me a brother of my own to be in this place at all.

MIKE MCINERNEY: I'll go with you! Let me out of this! It is the name of the McInerneys will be rising on every side!

MRS. DONOHOE: I don't know. I was ignorant of you being kept to the bed.

MIKE MCINERNEY: I am not kept to it, but maybe an odd time when there is a colic rises up within me. My stomach always gets better the time there is a change in the moon. I'd like well to draw anear you. My heavy blessing on you, Honor Donohoe, for the hand you have held out to me this day.

MRS. DONOHOE: Sure you could be keeping the fire in, and stirring the pot with the bit of Indian meal for the hens, and milking the goat and taking the tacklings off the donkey at the door; and maybe putting out the cabbage plants in their time. For when the old man died the garden died.

MIKE MCINERNEY: I could to be sure, and be cutting the potatoes for seed. What luck could there be in a place and



a man not to be in it ? Is that now a suit of clothes you have brought with you ?

MRS. DONOHUE : It is so, the way you will be tasty coming in among the neighbours of Curranroe.

MIKE MCINERNEY : My joy you are ! It is well you earned me ! Let me up out of this !

*[He sits up and spreads out the clothes and tries on coat.]*

That now is a good frieze coat . . . and a hat in the fashion . . .

*[He puts on hat.]*

MICHAEL MISKELL (*alarmed*) : And is it going out of this you are, Mike McInerney ?

MIKE MCINERNEY : Don't you hear I am going ? To Curranroe I am going. Going I am to a place where I will get every good thing !

MICHAEL MISKELL : And is it to leave me here after you will ?

MIKE MCINERNEY (*in a rising chant*) : Every good thing ! The goat and the kid are there, the sheep and the lamb are there, the cow does be running and she coming to be milked ! Ploughing and seed sowing, blossom at Christmas time, the cuckoo speaking through the dark days of the year ! Ah, what are you talking about ? Wheat high in hedges, no talk about the rent ! Salmon in the rivers as plenty as turf ! Spending and getting and nothing scarce ! Sport and pleasure, and music on the strings ! Age will go from me and I will be young again. Geese and turkeys for the hundreds and drink for the whole world !

MICHAEL MISKELL : Ah, Mike, is it truth you are saying, you to go from me and to leave me with rude people and with townspeople, and with people of every parish in the union, and they having no respect for me or no wish for me at all !

MIKE MCINERNEY : Whisht now and I'll leave you . . . my pipe (*hands it over*) ; and I'll engage it is Honor Donohue won't refuse to be sending you a few ounces of tobacco an odd time, and neighbours coming to the fair in November or in the month of May.



MICHAEL MISKELL: Ah, what signifies tobacco? All that I am craving is the talk. There to be no one at all to say out to whatever thought might be rising in my innate mind! To be lying here and no conversable person in it would be the abomination of misery!

MIKE MCINERNEY: Look now, Honor. . . . It is what I often heard said, two to be better than one. . . . Sure if you had an old trouser was full of holes . . . or a skirt . . . wouldn't you put another in under it that might be as tattered as itself, and the two of them together would make some sort of a decent show?

MRS. DONOHUE: Ah, what are you saying? There is no holes in that suit I brought you now, but as sound it is as the day I spun it for himself.

MIKE MCINERNEY: It is what I am thinking, Honor . . . I do be weak an odd time . . . any load I would carry, it preys upon my side . . . and this man does be weak an odd time with the swelling in his knees . . . but the two of us together it's not likely it is at the one time we would fail. Bring the both of us with you, Honor, and the height of the castle of luck on you, and the both of us together will make one good hardy man!

MRS. DONOHUE: I'd like my job! Is it queer in the head you are grown asking me to bring in a stranger off the road?

MICHAEL MISKELL: I am not, ma'am, but an old neighbour I am. If I had forecasted this asking I would have asked it myself. Michael Miskell I am, that was in the next house to you in Skehanagh!

MRS. DONOHUE: For pity's sake! Michael Miskell is it? That's worse again. Yourself and Mike that never left fighting and scolding and attacking one another! Sparring at one another like two young pups you were, and threatening one another after like two grown dogs!

MIKE MCINERNEY: All the quarrelling was ever in the place it was myself did it. Sure his anger rises fast and goes away like the wind. Bring him out with myself now, Honor Donohue, and God bless you.

MRS. DONOHUE: Well, then, I will not bring him out, and I will not bring yourself out, and you not to learn better sense. Are you making yourself ready to come?

MIKE MCINERNEY: I am thinking, maybe . . . it is a mean thing for a man that is shivering into seventy years to go changing from place to place.

MRS. DONOHOE: Well, take your luck or leave it. All I asked was to save you from the hurt and the harm of the year.

MIKE MCINERNEY: Bring the both of us with you or I will not stir out of this.

MRS. DONOHOE: Give me back my fine suit so (*begins gathering up the clothes*), till I'll go look for a man of my own !

MIKE MCINERNEY: Let you go so, as you are so unnatural and so disobliging, and look for some man of your own, God help him ! For I will not go with you at all !

MRS. DONOHOE: It is too much time I lost with you, and dark night waiting to overtake me on the road. Let the two of you stop together, and the back of my hand to you. It is I will leave you there the same as God left the Jews !

*[She goes out. The old men lie down and are silent for a moment.]*

MICHAEL MISKELL: Maybe the house is not so wide as what she says.

MIKE MCINERNEY: Why wouldn't it be wide ?

MICHAEL MISKELL: Ah, there does be a good deal of middling poor houses down by the sea.

MIKE MCINERNEY: What would you know about wide houses ? Whatever sort of a house you had yourself it was too wide for the provision you had into it.

MICHAEL MISKELL: Whatever provision I had in my house it was wholesome provision and natural provision. Herself and her periwinkles ! Periwinkles is a hungry sort of food.

MIKE MCINERNEY: Stop your impudence and your chat or it will be the worse for you. I'd bear with my own father and mother as long as any man would, but if they'd vex me I would give them the length of a rope as soon as another !

MICHAEL MISKELL: I would never ask at all to go eating periwinkles.

MIKE MCINERNEY (*sitting up*): Have you anyone to fight me ?

MICHAEL MISKELL (*whimpering*): I have not, only the Lord !

MIKE MCINERNEY: Let you leave putting insults on me so, and death picking at you !

MICHAEL MISKELL: Sure I am saying nothing at all to displease you. It is why I wouldn't go eating periwinkles, I'm in dread I might swallow the pin.

MIKE MCINERNEY: Who in the world wide is asking you to eat them ? You're as tricky as a fish in the full tide !

MICHAEL MISKELL: Tricky is it ! Oh, my curse and the curse of the four and twenty men upon you !

MIKE MCINERNEY: That the worm may chew you from skin to marrow bone !

[*Seizes his pillow.*]

MICHAEL MISKELL (*seizing his own pillow*): I'll leave my death on you, you scheming vagabone !

MIKE MCINERNEY: By cripes ! I'll pull out your pin feathers !

[*Throwing pillow.*]

MICHAEL MISKELL (*throwing pillow*): You tyrant ! You big bully you !

MIKE MCINERNEY (*throwing pillow and seizing mug*): Take this so, you stobbing ruffian you !

[*They throw all within their reach at one another, mugs, prayer books, pipes, etc.*]

CURTAIN

Sean O'Casey

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

*A Comedy*

## CHARACTERS

DARRY BERRILL – about fifty-five; stocky, obstinate, with a pretty big belly. He is completely bald, except for a tuft of grey hair just above the forehead.

BARRY DERRILL – Darry's neighbour. Same age as Darry. Thin, easy-going, big moustache, and is very near-sighted.

LIZZIE BERRILL – Darry's wife. About forty-five. A good woman about the house, but that's about all.

*This play was first performed by THE ENGLISH PLAYERS at the THÉÂTRE DE L'ŒUVRE, PARIS, on May 17th, 1939, with the following cast:*

<i>Darry Berrill</i>	—	—	—	—	EDWARD STIRLING
<i>Barry Derrill</i>	—	—	—	—	JAMES MILNER
<i>Lizzie Berrill</i>	—	—	—	—	MARGARET VAUGHAN

*It was produced by MR. EDWARD STIRLING.*

The music for the duet will be found in the original edition, published by Messrs. Macmillan and Co., Ltd., St Martin's Lane, London, W.C.2, at 3s. 6d. net.

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SCENE: *A big comfortable kitchen. Steep stairs, almost like a ladder, leading to upper room, top right. Huge fireplace, right. Some chairs, one heavy, with rubbered castors. Small settee, and table. Chest of drawers, left, on top of which stands a gramophone. Door back, and to left of door a window. To right of door, a dresser, on which is, as well as delf, a large clock of the alarm type. To right of dresser, on a nail, hangs a whip; to the left of dresser hangs a mandolin. On table, a quantity of unwashed delf. To right of fireplace, a lumber room. The room, at night, is lighted by an electric bulb, hanging from centre of ceiling. It is a fine early autumn evening, with the sun low in the heavens. On wall, back, a large red card on which "Do It Now" is written in white letters. A sink under the window.*

DARRY (*at door of room above. He is shaving, and his chin is covered with lather*): This shaving water's dead cold, woman. D'ye hear me? This shaving water's dead cold.

LIZZIE (*busy about the room—quietly*): Come down and heat it, then.

DARRY (*scornfully*): Too much to do, I suppose. I'd do all that has to be done here, three times over, 'n when all was finished, I'd be sighing for something to do.

LIZZIE: If you had half of what I have to do here, at the end of the evening you'd be picked up dead out of the debris.

DARRY: I would?

LIZZIE: You would.

DARRY: Sure?

LIZZIE: Certain.

DARRY: If I only had half to do?

LIZZIE: Or less.

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All applications for permission to perform this play must be made to Messrs. Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2; *or*, for South Africa, to Messrs. Samuel French, Ltd., P.O. Box 497, Nairobi; *or*, for Canada, to Messrs. Samuel French (Canada), Ltd., 480 University Avenue, Toronto; *or*, for the U.S.A., to Messrs. Samuel French, Inc., 25 West 45th Street, New York City, *or* 811 West 7th Street, Los Angeles.

DARRY: I'd be picked up out of the debris ?

LIZZIE: Out of the middle of it.

DARRY: Dead ?

LIZZIE: As a mackerel.

DARRY (*fiercely*): I'm always challenging you to change places for a few hours, but you won't do it. I'd show you what a sinecure of a job you had here, while I'm sweating out in the fields.

LIZZIE: Go out 'n finish the mowing of the meadow. It'll take you only half an hour or so, 'n there's plenty of light in the sky still.

DARRY (*who has been shaving himself during this argument*): The meadow'll do to be done to-morrow. Why don't you let me do what's to be done in the house, an' you go 'n mow the meadow ? Why don't you do that ? 'don't you do that ? 'you do that ? Agony to look at you ; agony to listen to you ; agony, agony to be anywhere near you.

LIZZIE: I'd just like to see you doing what's to be done about the house—I'd just like to see you.

DARRY: What is there to be done about the house—will you tell us that ?

LIZZIE: There's the pig 'n the heifer 'n the hens to be fed 'n tended. There's ironing, cooking, washing, 'n sewing to be done.

DARRY: Sewing ! An' only a button back 'n front of me so that it's next thing to a miracle that my trousers are kept from starting the neighbours talking.

LIZZIE: If you say much more, I'll go 'n mow the meadow, 'n leave you to see what you can make of the house-work.

DARRY (*angrily*): Buzz off, buzz off, then, an' I'll show you how the work of a house is done. Done quietly ; done with speed, 'n without a whisper of fuss in its doing. Buzz off, if you want to, 'n I'll show you 'n all your sex how the work of a house is done !

[LIZZIE violently pulls off a jazz-coloured overall she is wearing, and flings it on the floor.]

LIZZIE (*furiously*): Put that on you, then, 'n do what remains to be done about the house, while I go an' mow the meadow. Get into it, 'n show the world an' your poor wife the wonders you can do when you're under a woman's overall.

DARRY (*a little frightened*): Oh, I'll manage all right.

LIZZIE: An' don't you let that Alice Lanigan in here while I'm away either, d'ye hear?

DARRY: What Alice Lanigan?

LIZZIE (*in a temper*): What Alice Lanigan! The Alice Lanigan I caught you chattering to yesterday, when you should have been mowing the meadow. The Alice Lanigan that's setting you on to nag at me about the little I have to do in the house. The Alice Lanigan that's goading you into the idea that if you were a little slimmer round the belly, you'd be a shevaleer, an's getting you to do physical jerks. The Alice Lanigan that's on the margin of fifty, 'n assembles herself together as if she was a girl in her teens, jutting out her bust when she's coming in, 'n jutting out her behind when she's going out, like the Lady of Shalott, to catch the men—that's the Alice Lanigan I mean.

DARRY: I don't be thinking of Alice Lanigan.

LIZZIE: I've seen you, when you thought I slumbered 'n slep, naked, with nothing at all on you, doing your physical jerks in front of the looking-glass, 'n that, too, when the lessons of a Mission were still hot in your heart—an' all for Alice Lanigan. Maybe you don't know that she has a kid who has never had a pat on the head from a father.

DARRY: You buzz off now, 'n I'll show how the work of a house is done.

LIZZIE (*while she is putting a broad-brimmed hat on her head, pulling a pair of old gloves over her hands, and taking down a whip hanging from a nail in the wall*): I'm telling you it's a dangerous thing to shake hands with Alice Lanigan, even with a priest giving the introduction. The day'll come soon when you'll know she's making mechanical toys of you 'n that other old fool, Barry Derrill, who's so near-sighted that he can't see the sky, unless the moon's shining in it!

DARRY: Cheerio.

LIZZIE (*at the door*): I'm going now, 'n we'll see how you do the work of the house.

DARRY: Hail 'n farewell to you. An' mind you, this'll be only the beginning of things.

LIZZIE: God grant that it won't be the end, an' that when I come back, I'll at least find the four walls standing.

[*She goes out. DARRY strolls to the door, and watches her going down the road.*]

DARRY (*scornfully to himself*): Mow the meadow ! Well, let her see her folly out.

[*As she shuts the door, the clock in the distant Town Hall strikes eight, DARRY returns, glances at the clock on the dresser, notices that it has stopped, takes it up, puts his ear against it, shakes it, begins to wind it, finds it difficult to turn, puts added strength into the turning, and a whirring rattle, like a strong spring breaking, comes from the inside of the clock. He hastily replaces the clock on the dresser. After a few seconds' thought, he takes it up again, removes the back, and part of a big, broken spring darts out, which he hurriedly crams in again, and puts the clock back on the dresser.*]

DARRY: Lizzie again !

[*He catches sight of the gramophone, looks at it, thinks for a second, goes over to the chest of drawers, takes some records from behind it and fixes one on the disc of the gramophone. He takes off his waistcoat, loosens his braces, stands stiff, strokes his thighs, pats his belly, and tries to push it back a little. He starts the gramophone going, runs to the centre of the room, and lies down on the broad of his back. The gramophone begins to give directions for physical exercises, to which DARRY listens and awkwardly, clumsily and puffingly, tries to follow the movements detailed in the words spoken by the gramophone when the music commences.*]

GRAMOPHONE: Lie on back ; hands behind the head ; feet together—are you ready ? Bend the right knee ; draw it into the waistline, towards the chest—commence !

[*DARRY is too slow, or the gramophone is too quick, for he can't keep up with the time of the music. When he finds that he is behind the time of the music, DARRY increases his speed by partial performance of the movements, and so gets into touch with the time, but presently, blowing and panting, he is out of time again by a*



beat or two. *He climbs stiffly on to his feet, goes over to gramophone, and puts the indicator to "Slow."*

DARRY: Phuh. Too quick, too damn quick altogether.

*[He starts the gramophone going, runs to the centre of the room, and again lies down on the broad of his back. When the music begins he goes through the movements as before; but the music is playing so slowly now that he finds it impossible to go slowly enough to keep to the time of the tune. When he finds himself in front of a beat, he stops and puffs and waits for the beat to catch up with him before he recommences. As he is going through these movements, the door opens, and BARRY DERRILL comes into the room. He has a mandolin under his arm, and is wearing wide-rimmed, thick-lensed spectacles.]*

BARRY (*briskly*): Come 'n kiss me sweet 'n twenty—what the hell are you trying to do?

DARRY: Can't you see what I'm trying to do? Take off your spectacles 'n get a closer look. Keeping meself fit 'n flexible—that's what I'm trying to do.

BARRY: The rhythm's too slow, man; tense your muscles; you're not tun'd into the movements properly, man.

DARRY: The indicator must have shifted. Slip over 'n put it to the point marked medium, 'n then get down here 'n give us a hand.

BARRY: What about the prologue of playing the song we're to sing at the Town Hall concert?

DARRY: Get down 'n have five minutes of this, first; we'll both sing the better for it.

BARRY (*dubiously*): Never done it to music, 'n I wouldn't be able to keep in touch with the,—with the measure.

DARRY: The music makes it easier, man. Keep your eye on me 'n move when I move.

*[BARRY reluctantly takes off his coat and waistcoat, goes over to the gramophone, puts his nose against the instrument, and puts the indicator to "Fast."]*

DARRY: To do this thing properly you'd want to be wearing shorts. Right; now keep in touch with the rhythm, or you'll mar everything. Start her off, and stretch yourself down.



[BARRY starts the gramophone, runs over and lies down opposite to DARRY, so that the soles of their feet are only a few inches apart.

GRAMOPHONE (*very rapidly*): Lie on back; hands behind the head; feet together—are you ready? Bend the right knee; draw it into the waistline towards the chest; breathe out—commence!

[*The tempo of the tune forces them to do the exercises in a frantic way, till it dawns on DARRY, who is nearly exhausted, that there's something wrong. He stops while BARRY goes on manfully.*

DARRY (*scornfully*): Eh, eh, there, wait a minute, wait a minute, man. Don't you see anything wrong?

BARRY (*stopping*): No; what's wrong?

DARRY (*testily*): Aw, what's wrong! We're congestin' ourselves with speed; that's what's wrong. You must have jammed the indicator hard to Fast. (*He gets up, goes to the gramophone, and puts it right.*) We're entertainin' ourselves, Barry, an' not tryin' to say the Rosary.

[*He comes back and stretches himself again on the floor. The music begins and the two men commence the exercises. After a few moments, DARRY slows down a little, misses several beats, and tries to blame BARRY.*

DARRY (*excitedly keeping up the movements, but out of time, as he talks*): Try to keep the proper rhythm up, man. (*He hums the tune of "Coming thro' the Rye."*) Dah th' didee dah th' diddy dah th' diddy dee—that way man. Dah th' diddy dah th' diddy (*rapidly*). Keep your eye on me. Dah th' diddy dee.

[*After a few movements DARRY is out of time and breathless; he stops and sits up to complain, but he really wants to get a rest.*

DARRY (*with aggravated patience*): Barry, you're spoiling the whole thing by getting out of time. Don't let your arms and legs go limber, tense your muscles. Three beats to the bar, see? Now!

[*They start again; DARRY is soon behind time, blowing and puffing out of him. BARRY keeps to the beat of the tune splendidly.*

DARRY (*angrily*): You're going too damn quick, altogether, now, man!

BARRY: No I'm not—I'm there to the tick every time.

DARRY (*violently*): There to the tick—how is it you're not in the line with me, then, if you're there to the tick? I don't know whether you're in front of me or behind me. Are you too stiff or what?

BARRY: I'm there to the second every time. It's you that's missin' a beat in the bar.

DARRY (*indignantly, stopping to talk, while BARRY goes on*): I'm missin' it because I'm tryin' to foster you into the right balance 'n rhythm of the movements. That's why I'm missin' it. (*Loudly*) An' I'm wastin' me time!

BARRY (*sharply*): I'm doin' me best, amn't I?

DARRY (*more sharply still*): Your best's a hell of a way behind what's wanted. It's pitiful 'n painful to be watchin' you, man. (*He stands up and looks at BARRY, who keeps going.*) Eh, eh, you'll do yourself an injury, Barry. Get up 'n we'll do the song. (*As BARRY goes on*) Oh, get up 'n we'll do the song.

[BARRY gets up reluctantly, and DARRY goes over and stops the gramophone.]

BARRY: I was doin' it well enough, if you'd let me alone.

DARRY (*scornfully*): Yes; like the "Londonderry Air" play'd in march time.

[*They get their mandolins and stand side by side at the back.*]

DARRY: Now we walk in a semicircle down to the front, 'n bow, you remember? Ready?

BARRY: Yep.

DARRY: Go!

[*They both step off to the right, take a few steps, and then they halt.*]

BARRY: Something wrong; we don't go round the same way, do we?

DARRY (*testily*): Of course there's something wrong; of course we don't go round the same way. Can't you try to remember, Barry? You're to go to the left, to the left.

BARRY: I remember distinctly I was to go to the right.

DARRY (*irritably*): Oh, don't be such an egotist, Barry. Now think for a minute. (*A pause.*) Now make up your mind—d'ye want to go to the left or the right?

BARRY (*testily*): Oh, left, right—any way.

DARRY: Left, then. Go.

*[They march round, one to the right, the other to the left, meet in the front, and bow.]*

DARRY: You start, Barry, my boy.

BARRY (*singing*):

One summer eve a handsome man met a handsome maiden  
strolling,

DARRY:

Down where the bees were hummin' an' the wild flowers  
gaily growing;

BARRY:

Said she we'll sit down here a while, all selfish thoughts  
controlling,

DARRY:

Down where the bees are hummin' an' the wild flowers  
gaily growing:

BARRY:

Said she we'll meditate on things, things high 'n edifying,  
How all things live 'n have their day 'n end their day by  
dying.

He put his hand on her white breast an' murmur'd life is  
trying,

DARRY:

Down where the bees are hummin' an' the wild flowers  
gaily growing.

BARRY:

The moon glanc'd down 'n wonder'd what the pair of them  
were doing,

DARRY:

Down where the bees were hummin' an' the wild flowers  
gaily growing;

BARRY:

Then th' moon murmur'd, I feel hot, 'n fear a storm is  
brewing,

DARRY:

Down where the bees are hummin' an' the wild flowers  
gaily growing.

BARRY:

She talk'd so well of things so high, he started to reward  
her,

The moon ran in behind a cloud, for there was none to  
guard her.

I'll take that off, she said, you'd ruin the lace that's round  
the border,

DARRY:

Down where the bees are hummin' an' the wild flowers  
gaily growing.

BARRY:

White-featur'd 'n thin goodie-goodies rush around excited,

DARRY:

Down where the bees are hummin' an' the wild flowers  
gaily growing;

BARRY:

Proclaiming that the dignity of living has been blighted,

DARRY:

Down where the bees are hummin' an' the wild flowers  
gaily growing.

BARRY:

But when the light is soft 'n dim, discovery disarming,  
The modest moon behind the clouds, young maidens, coy  
'n charming,

Still cuddle men who cuddle them 'n carry on alarming,

DARRY:

Down where the bees are hummin' an' the wild flowers  
gaily growing.

*[When the song has ended, DARRY cocks his ear and listens.]*

BARRY: Shall we try it once more?

DARRY: Shush, shut up, can't you ?

[DARRY goes over to the door, opens it and listens intently. There is heard the rattling whirr caused by the steady and regular movement of a mowing machine. The distant Town Hall clock strikes nine.

DARRY (*hastily putting the mandolin away*): I forgot. I'll have to get going.

BARRY: Get going at what ?

DARRY: House-work. (*He begins to get into the overall left off by LIZZIE.*) I dared her, an' she left me to do the work of the house while she was mowing the meadow. If it isn't done when she comes back, then sweet good-bye to the status I had in the home. (*He finds it difficult to get the overall on.*) Dih dih dih, where's the back 'n where's the front, 'n which is which is the bottom 'n which is the top ?

BARRY: Take it quietly, take it quietly, Darry.

DARRY (*resentfully*): Take it quietly ? An' the time galloping by ? I can't stand up on a chair 'n say to the sun, stand thou still there, over the meadow th' missus is mowing, can I ?

BARRY: I know damn well you can't, but you're not going to expedite matters by rushing around in a hurry.

DARRY (*he has struggled into the overall*): Expedite matters ! It doesn't seem to strike you that when you do things quickly, things are quickly done. Expedite matters ! I suppose loitering to look at you lying on the broad of your back, jiggling your legs about, was one way of expediting matters; an' listening to you plucking curious sounds out of a mandolin, an' singing a questionable song, was another way of expediting matters ?

BARRY: You pioneered me into doing the two of them yourself.

DARRY (*busy with the pot on the fire*): I pioneered you into doing them ! Barry Derrick, there's such a thing in the world as a libel. You came strutting in with a mandolin under your arm, didn't you ?

BARRY: I did, but——

DARRY: An' you sang your song.



BARRY: Yes, but——

DARRY: When you waltz'd in, I was doing calisthenics, wasn't I?

BARRY: I know you were; but all the same——

DARRY: An' you flung yourself down on the floor, and got yourself into a tangle trying to do them too, didn't you?

BARRY: Hold on a second——

DARRY: Now, I can't carry the conversation into a debate, for I have to get going. So if you can't give a hand, go, 'n let me do the things that have to be done, in an orderly 'n quiet way.

BARRY: 'Course I'll give a hand—only waiting to be asked.

DARRY (*looking at the clock, suddenly*): Is the clock stopped?

BARRY (*taking up clock and putting it close to his ear*): There's no ticking, 'n it's hours slow.

DARRY: Lizzie again! Forgot to wind it. Give the key a few turns, Barry, an' put the hands on to half-past nine.

[BARRY starts to wind the clock. DARRY goes over to table, gets a basin of water, begins to wash the delf, humming to himself the air of the song, "Down where the bees are humming." BARRY winds and winds away, but no sign is given of a tightening of the spring inside. He looks puzzled, winds again, and is about to silently put the clock back where he found it, when DARRY turns and looks at him questioningly.]

DARRY: You've broken the damn thing, have you?

BARRY: I didn't touch it.

DARRY: Didn't touch it? Amn't I after looking at you twisting an' tearing at it for nearly an hour? (*He comes over to BARRY.*) Show me that. (*He takes the clock from BARRY and opens the back, and the spring darts out.*) Didn't touch it. Oh, for God's sake be more careful when you're handling things in this house! Dih dih dih. (*He pushes the spring back, and slaps the clock down on the dresser.*) You must have the hands of a gorilla, man. Here, come over 'n wipe while I wash.

[A slight pause while the two of them work at the delf. DARRY anxiously watches BARRY, who, being very near-sighted, holds everything he wipes close up to his spectacles.]

DARRY (*suddenly*): Look out, look out, there—you're not leaving that jug on the table at all; you're depositing it in the air, man!

BARRY (*peering down at the table*): Am I? Don't be afraid, I won't let anything drop.

DARRY (*humming the song*): Dum dah de de dum da dee dee dum dah dee dee dee dah ah dum.

BARRY (*swinging his arm to the tune*): Down where the bees are hummin' an' the wild flowers gaily growing.

DARRY: Fine swing, you know. Dum dah dee dee dum dah dee dee dum dah dee dee dee dah ah dum.

BARRY (*swinging his arm*): Down where the bees are hummin'—

[BARRY's arm sends the jug flying off the table on to the floor.

DARRY (*yelling*): You snaky-arm'd candle-power-ey'd elephant, look at what you're after doing!

BARRY (*heatedly*): It's only a tiny jug, anyhow, 'n you can hardly see the pieces on the floor!

DARRY (*just as heatedly*): An' if I let you do much more, they would soon be big enough to bury us! Sit down, sit down in the corner there; do nothing, say nothing, an', if I could, I'd put a safety curtain round you. For God's sake, touch nothing while I run out an' give the spuds to the pig.

[DARRY dashes over to the fire, whips the pot off, and runs out. He leaves the door open, and again the rattling whirr of a mowing machine can be heard. BARRY sits dejectedly in a corner. After a few moments a bump is heard outside, followed by a yell from DARRY, who, a second later, comes rushing madly in, a bloody handkerchief pressed to his nose. He flings himself flat on the floor on his back, elevating his nose as much as possible.

DARRY: Get me something cold to put down the back of my neck, quick!

BARRY (*frightened*): What the hell did you do to yourself?

DARRY: I didn't bend low enough when I was going in, 'n I gave myself such a, oh such a bang on my nose on the concrete. Get something cold, man, to shove down the back of my neck 'n stop the bleeding!

BARRY: Keep the nose sticking up in the air as high as you can. I don't know where to get something cold to shove down the back of your neck. I knew this rushing round wouldn't expedite matters.

DARRY (*with a moan of resentment as he hears "expedite matters"*): Oh, pull yourself together, man, 'n remember we're in the middle of an emergency.

BARRY: A little block of ice, now, would come in handy.

DARRY: A little—oh, a little block of ice! An' will you tell us where you're going to get a little block of ice? An', even if we had one, how could you fasten it down the back of my neck? Eh? Can't you answer—where are you going to get a block of ice?

BARRY: How the hell do I know where I'm going to get it?

DARRY: D'ye expect me to keep lying here till the winter comes?

[*During this dialogue BARRY is moving round the room aimlessly, peering into drawers, rattling the delf on the dresser with his nose as he looks along the shelves.*]

DARRY (*as he hears the crockery rattling*): Mind, mind, or you'll break something. I must be losing a lot of blood, Barry, an' I won't be able to keep my nose sticking up in the air much longer. Can't you find anything?

BARRY: I can see nothing.

DARRY: Run upstairs 'n get the key of the big shed that's hanging on the wall, somewhere over the mantelpiece at the far end of the room. Go quick, man!

[*BARRY runs upstairs, goes into room, comes out again, and looks down at DARRY.*]

DARRY (*up to him*): Did you get it?

BARRY: Where's the switch? It's as dark as pitch in there.

[*DARRY, with a moan of exasperation, sits up, but immediately plunges down on his back again.*]

DARRY: Starts pumping out again the minute I sit up. (*To BARRY*) There's no switch in that room. We can't have a switch in every corner of the room just to suit you! You've

only got to move down the centre of the room till you come to the fireplace; then brush your hand over the mantelpiece, along the wall, till you feel the key hanging there.

[BARRY goes back into the room. After a few seconds' silence, there is a crash of falling crockery. DARRY, after a second of silent consternation, sits up with a jerk, but immediately plunges down on his back again.

DARRY (*sinking supine on the floor*): What has he done now; oh, what has he done now? (*Shouting up to BARRY*) Eh, you up there—what have you done now?

BARRY (*sticking his head out of door above*): Nothing much—the washhand-stand fell over.

DARRY (*angrily*): Nothing much. It sounded a hell of a lot, then. You're the kind of man if you're not chained up, 'll pull everything in the house asundher! Come down, come down, 'n stop down, or that delicate little hand of yours 'll smash everything in the house!

BARRY: My eyes are used to the darkness, now, 'n I can see. I'll get the key for you.

[He goes back into the room, leaving DARRY speechless. After a few seconds, he comes out of the room in a sweat of fright and anger, one hand tightly clasped over the other. He rushes down the stairs, and begins to pull the things out of the chest of drawers, every other moment leaving off to clasp one hand over the other.

BARRY (*frantically*): Get your own key, get your own key. Half slaughtering myself for your sake! Why don't you keep your razor-blades in a safe place, an' not leave them scattered about in heaps all over the mantelpiece? Where is there a bit of old rag till I bind up my wounds? Get your own key yourself, I'm tellin' you.

DARRY: Amn't I nicely handicapped, wanting help an' having only the help of a half-blind man?

BARRY: D'ye know I'm nearly after mowing my fingers off with your blasted razor-blades? (*Coming near to DARRY, with a handkerchief in his hand, and showing the injured fingers to him*) Look at them, uh, look at them—one looks as if only a thin thread of flesh was keeping it on. How am I going to play the mandolin now?



DARRY: You'd play it better if all your fingers were off.

BARRY (*keeping the wounded hand in the air, and holding out the handkerchief to DARRY with the other*): Here, get a grip of this 'n help me to bind up me wounds.

[BARRY *kneels down beside the prostrate DARRY, who takes the handkerchief and proceeds to tie it round BARRY's wounded fingers.*

DARRY (*keeping his nose well up in the air*): You give that an unexpected honour, if you call that a wound !

[DARRY *ties the handkerchief round BARRY's hand, who stands looking at it.*

BARRY (*reflectively*): Won't be able to do much for you with it now.

DARRY: It'll limit your capacity for breakin' things.

[*A pause.*

DARRY: Slip out, Barry, old son, 'n see if the heifer's safe on the bank beside the house.

[BARRY *goes outside the door and stands looking up towards the top of the house. The light has been fading, and it is getting dark. Again can be heard the whirr of the mowing machine, and the Town Hall clock strikes ten.*

BARRY: I think I can hear her croppin' the grass all right, but it doesn't seem wise to leave her there 'n the dusk fallin'.

DARRY (*testily*): I can't do anything till this bleeding stops, can I ?

BARRY: The spuds are all scattered about here where you let them fall when you were runnin' in.

DARRY (*moaning*): 'N can't you get the broom 'n sweep them up into a corner, 'n not be trampling them into the ground; you see the state I'm in !

[BARRY *gets the broom and starts to sweep outside the door.*

BARRY (*in to DARRY*): How's it now ?

DARRY (*cautiously sitting up*): It's nearly stopped now, but I'll have to go cautious.



[BARRY, *sweeping with one hand, manages to bring the broom-handle into contact with the window, and breaks a pane. A silent pause.*

BARRY (*as if he didn't know*): What's that, what's that?

DARRY (*in an agony of anger*): What's that, what's that! Can't you see, man, that you're after thrustin' the handle of the broom through one of the windows?

BARRY (*peering down at the hole in the window*): That's curious, now, for I never felt the handle touchin' the window; but there's a hole in it, right enough.

DARRY (*with angry mockery*): No, you wouldn't feel it touchin' it, either. A hole in it—of course there's a hole in it! My God Almighty, I've a destroyin' angel in the house!

BARRY: Well, not much use of lookin' at it now.

DARRY (*vehemently*): Oh come in, come in, come in, man. Didn't you hear the clock strikin' ten? I'll have to get goin' now.

[*He gets up gingerly, feeling his nose, and still keeping it at a high angle.*

BARRY (*introducing another subject*): Hadn't you better stable the heifer before you do anything?

DARRY (*violently*): Haven't I to clean out the cowhouse first before I stable her, man? With your exercisin', 'n your singin', 'n your great 'n godly gift of expeditin' matters, I haven't made a bit of headway! I hadn't a chance to give her the graze she needs, so let her get all she can on the bank at the back of the house.

BARRY: Supposing she wanders to the edge of the bank 'n tumbles off?

DARRY: I don't know what to do about that.

BARRY: Couldn't you tie her to something?

DARRY (*angrily*): There's nothing to tie her to, man.

BARRY: What about putting a rope down the chimney 'n tying it to something in the room?

DARRY (*after a few seconds' thought*): That's a good idea, Barry. There's a rope outside, an' I'll sling one end round her neck, let the other end down the chimney, an' tie it to a chair. Wait here a second 'n get it when it comes down.

[DARRY rushes out. After a few moments his voice is heard faintly from above calling, "Hello, hello!" BARRY, who has his head a little up the chimney, the smoke making him cough, answers, "Righto, let her come." The rope comes down; BARRY catches the end and pulls it into the room. DARRY returns, and they tie the rope to a chair.

BARRY: Put the chair at the far end of the room, an' if the heifer wanders too far, we'll see the chair moving across the room.

DARRY (*with enthusiasm*): Now you're beginnin' to use your brains at last, Barry, me boy. (*He shifts the chair to the far end of the room.*) Now we can get goin' 'n get everything ship-shape before the missus toddles back. Let's put on the light to see what we're doin'.

[*He snaps down the switch, but no light comes into the bulb.*

DARRY (*annoyed*): Dih dih dih—must be the meter again.

[*He hurries into the lumber room, stepping over the rope.*

BARRY (*speaking in to DARRY*): I wouldn't do much tamperin' with that.

DARRY (*inside room—emphatically*): Oh, I know what I'm doin'.

[DARRY rushes out again, snaps down the switch, but no light comes.

DARRY (*irritably*): Must be the blasted bulb. (*He rushes to a drawer.*) There's a bulb here, somewhere, we've had for a long time, 'n never used. (*He takes one from the drawer.*) Here we are. (*He pulls a chair to the centre of the room, stands on it, takes off the old bulb, and gives it to BARRY.*) See if you can see anything wrong with it.

BARRY (*holding it to his nose*): Can't see anything.

DARRY: Leave it down, leave it down.

BARRY: Sure the one you're fixing's the right voltage?

DARRY (*stopping to look at BARRY*): Course it's the right voltage. Why wouldn't it be the right voltage?

BARRY: If it wasn't, it might fuse.

DARRY: Fuse. No fear of it fusing. (*He starts to work again.*)

[*The chair to which the rope is tied begins to move across the floor.*]

BARRY (*startled*): Look out, look out—the heifer's moving!

DARRY: Catch hold of it, catch hold of it, before she disappears up the chimney!

[*BARRY catches the chair, but the strain is too much, and he is pulled along. DARRY jumps down off his chair, leaves the bulb on the table, catches hold of the rope, and helps BARRY to tug the other chair back to the far end of the room.*]

DARRY: You sit on the chair, 'n then she can't move without our knowledge.

[*BARRY sits on one chair; DARRY mounts the other again, and starts to fix the bulb. BARRY's chair begins to move with him sitting on it.*]

BARRY (*excitedly*): Eh, quick again, get down, the heifer's movin'!

[*DARRY jumps down again, and the two of them pull the chair back to its place.*]

DARRY: The missus'll be back 'n nothin' done but damage.

[*He gets up again and fixes the bulb; there is a flash, and the room is darker than ever.*]

BARRY (*like a prophet*): I warned you, Darry; I saw it comin'.

DARRY (*forcibly*): What are you blatherin' about? We're no worse off than we were before we fixed it. There's a drum of oil in the lumber room, 'n if there's any left in it we can light the lamps. You light the one hangin' on the wall, while I see how we stand.

[*He runs into the lumber room. BARRY takes the lamp from the wall, removes the chimney, and tries to light the wick, but he can't see it, and holds the match anywhere but near the wick. DARRY comes out of cellar.*]

DARRY (*jubilantly*): Plenty of oil in it. Aw, you're not holding the match within a mile of the wick, man. Show it to me, show it to me.

[*He takes the match from BARRY, and lights the lamp.*]

DARRY: Out with you now, 'n get one of the old lamps you'll find on one of the shelves to the right in the shed at the back of the yard.

BARRY: How'll I see?

DARRY: Strike a match 'n look. You'll see them staring at you. I'll take a canful of oil from the drum to put in it when you bring it back, 'n then we'll have lashin's of light.

BARRY (*going out by door*): I know I won't be able to see.

[*DARRY, with a can that has a long snout on it, runs back into the lumber room. BARRY has left the door open, and the rattling whirr of the mowing machine can be heard again. There is a slight pause. Suddenly DARRY rushes out of the lumber room over to the open door.*]

DARRY (*shouting madly*): Barry, Barry, come here quick, man! I turned the key of the tap too much, 'n it slipped out of me hand into a heap of rubbish, 'n I can't turn off the cock, 'n I can't find the key in the dark. Come quick, man, or there won't be a drop of oil left in the drum!

[*He rushes wildly back into the lumber room. Another slight pause. He rushes out again, with the drum in his arms, his thumb pressed to the tap outlet, and runs over to the door.*]

DARRY (*calling madly*): Eh, Barry, Barry, d'ye hear me callin' you, man? I won't be able to keep this oil in much longer. Have you fallen asleep, or what?

[*There is heard outside a rattle, followed by a crash of falling pots, tins, and tools; then a dead silence for a moment.*]

DARRY (*staggering against the wall*): Aw, Mother o' God, what's he after doin' now!

BARRY (*outside, in a loud voice of great distress*): Darry, oh Darry, I'm after nearly destroyin' meself! Where's the doorway?—I can't see!



DARRY (*going over and standing in the doorway*): Here, here, man; no, to the left. (*As BARRY staggers in, dusty and frightened*) What ruin are you after causin' now?

BARRY (*moaningly*): I'm after gettin' an awful shock!

DARRY (*appealingly*): Pull yourself together, for God's sake man, 'n tell us what's happened.

BARRY (*as he sinks down on a chair*): The blasted lamps were on top of the top shelf; there was nothing to stand on; I had to climb up on the shelves, and climbing up, the shelves 'n all that was on them came down on top of me!

[DARRY goes over and rests the drum in the sink, his hand still pressed over the outlet of the tap.

DARRY: 'N why did you climb the shelves? What did you want to do that for? Couldn't you see, you sap, that they weren't fixed well in the wall? Why did you insist on climbing the shelves?

BARRY: I was just tryin' to expedite matters.

DARRY (*with a wail*): Tryin' to expedite matters. Oh, there'll be a nice panorama of ruin in front of Lizzie when she comes back!

BARRY: 'N me spectacles were sent flyin' when the shelves fell.

DARRY: 'N why didn't you grab them before they fell to the ground?

BARRY (*hotly*): How could I grab them 'n they fallin', when I was fallin' too!

DARRY (*impatiently*): Well, get the lamp then, 'n look for the lost key in the lumber room.

BARRY: 'N maybe let it fall, 'n set the house on fire?

DARRY (*woefully*): Oh amn't I in a nice predic— The chair, the chair—the heifer's movin'!

[The chair to which the rope is tied begins to move across the floor. BARRY catches it, tugs manfully, but he is carried on towards the fireplace.

BARRY (*anxiously*): Give us a hand, give us a hand, or I'll be up the chimney!



[DARRY leaving the drum, runs over to BARRY's side, grips the rope in front of BARRY, and, to get a safer hold, takes the rope off the chair and puts it round him under his arms. With great pulling, they get the rope a little back. The oil flows from the drum into the sink unnoticed.]

DARRY (*panting*): Keep a sthrain, or we'll be up the chimney!

BARRY: How'm I goin' to get home to-night without me spectacles?

DARRY (*loudly*): Keep a sthrain on her, man, keep a sthrain on her; we have to get this straightened out first, before we can brood over your spectacles!

BARRY (*suddenly noticing the oil drum*): The oil, the oil!

[*He lets go of the rope, and runs over to the oil drum. DARRY disappears up the chimney.*]

BARRY (*lifting the drum and shaking it*): Not a drop left in it, not a single drop! What're we goin' to do n——

[*He turns and sees that DARRY has disappeared.*]

LIZZIE (*speaking outside in a voice of horror*): The heifer, the heifer!

DARRY (*calling out*): Lizzie, Lizzie!

[LIZZIE rushes in as DARRY falls down the chimney. He crawls out from the fireplace on his hands and knees, and halts there, exhausted and sooty.]

LIZZIE (*horrified*): What in the Name of God has happened?

DARRY (*to LIZZIE*): Now you see the result of havin' your own way! Why the hell didn't you hold on to the rope when you took it off the heifer, so that I wouldn't come down with a bump?

LIZZIE: How'd I know you were hangin' on the other end?

DARRY (*indignantly*): You didn't know—my God, woman, can you do nothin' right!



Lennox Robinson

CHURCH STREET

*A Play*

Human Will and Human Fate:  
What is little, what is great?  
Howsoe'er the answer be,  
Let me sing of what I know.

WILLIAM ALLINGHAM.

## FOR NORREYS DAVIDSON

*The first production of "Church Street" took place on May 21st, 1934, in THE ABBEY THEATRE, DUBLIN, with the following cast:*

<i>Joseph Riordan</i>	—	—	—	BARRY FITZGERALD
<i>Kate Riordan</i>	—	—	—	MAUREEN DELANY
<i>Hugh</i>	—	—	—	ARTHUR SHIELDS
<i>Jack</i>	—	—	—	JOSEPH O'NEILL .
<i>Mollie</i>	—	—	—	JENNIFER DAVIDSON
<i>Aunt Moll</i>	—	—	—	EILEEN CROWE
<i>Mrs. de Lacy</i>	—	—	—	CHRISTINE HAYDEN
<i>Miss Pettigrew</i>	—	—	—	MAY CRAIG
<i>Sallie Long</i>	—	—	—	SHELAH RICHARDS
<i>Jim Daly</i>	—	—	—	F. J. MCCORMICK
<i>Honor Bewley</i>	—	—	—	ANN CLERY
<i>The Evoked Hugh</i>	—	—	—	DENIS O'DEA
<i>Doctor Smith</i>	—	—	—	MICHAEL J. DOLAN
<i>Nurse Smith</i>	—	—	—	FROLIE MULHERN
<i>A Clergyman</i>	—	—	—	P. J. CAROLAN

*The play was produced by the author.*

THE SCENE is the drawing-room in the National Bank, Knock. Comfortably furnished, not overcrowded, an upright piano, a largish table in the middle of the room. Dark wallpaper. A fire-place on the audience's R., a door in the middle of the wall L. (leading to the dining-room), another door in the back wall towards the R. When the play begins MRS. RIORDAN is poking the fire, which is already blazing brightly; she is a pleasant-looking, middle-aged woman. At the table in the centre facing the audience but hidden from them by a "*Manchester Guardian*" which she is reading sits AUNT MOLL. It is evening, and the room is brightly lit by electric light. If a window has to be shown, it is heavily curtained. The door at the right opens and HUGH comes in. He is about twenty-eight years old, dressed carelessly, grey flannel bags, a pullover, an old tweed jacket. His mother is quite grandly dressed as if for an evening party. HUGH has a tired, discontented look.

MRS. RIORDAN: Oh, Hugh darling, there you are. Did you have a nice rest?

HUGH: No. Never slept a wink.

MRS. RIORDAN: Now, isn't that too bad? But you can get to bed early.

HUGH: What a hope! With all these awful people coming?

MRS. RIORDAN: They won't stay late. You've forgotten what early hours we keep in Knock—not like your London. They'll all be gone by ten o'clock—half-past ten at latest.

HUGH: I wish to goodness you hadn't asked them at all.

MRS. RIORDAN: Darling, they're all dying to see you, and it was the only evening I could have them this week.

HUGH (*with a little sneer*): Has Knock suddenly become so gay?

MRS. RIORDAN: Well, I don't know how it is but there seems to be something almost every night—there's badminton in the Town Hall every Wednesday, and there's the bridge club and of course the pictures; they change them twice a week, so that's two nights gone and——

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All applications for permission to perform this play must be made to the author's agents, Messrs. Curtis Brown, Ltd., 6 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.2; or 18 East 48th Street, New York City.



HUGH: And a little party at the Moore's or the Daly's, I know.

MRS. RIORDAN: Anyway I had to seize this evening, you're such a fly-away; why last time you were here—four years ago—you only stayed three days, do you remember?

HUGH: I remember.

MRS. RIORDAN: Having them to-night does mean your father giving up his game of bridge at the Munster and Leinster Bank; he was a little touchy about it, but I said he must be here.

HUGH: He needn't have given it up.

MRS. RIORDAN: Maybe not. For this time you'll stay weeks and weeks, won't you? But I never can trust you. Some theatre will be wanting to put on one of your plays and off you'll fly.

HUGH: Put on one of my plays? That is likely, after their last experience with me.

MRS. RIORDAN: I wouldn't mind that for a minute. You can't be a success all the time.

HUGH: *All the time!*

MRS. RIORDAN: I know, darling, you haven't been properly appreciated yet, but you will be. All great writers have had to struggle just as you have. (*He contemptuously shrugs his shoulders.*) Have you unpacked your bags?

HUGH: No.

MRS. RIORDAN: You've very little time to change. They'll be here any minute.

HUGH: I'm not changing. If they don't like me as I am, they can just lump me.

MRS. RIORDAN: Oh. . . . Of course they'll like you no matter how you're dressed; but Honor's coming, and Jack's wife; she's so nice and rather smart, and I'd like the first time she sees you—I'd have your things unpacked in a jiffy. I'm sure you've a very smart London suit upstairs.

HUGH: No, don't bother.

MRS. RIORDAN (*starting to go*): No bother at all. I should have unpacked you the minute you arrived.

HUGH (*stopping her*): Please don't, Mother. It's not worth while.

MRS. RIORDAN: Not worth while?

HUGH: No. The fact is I'm—I'm not staying.

MRS. RIORDAN: Not staying?

HUGH: Well, just till to-morrow morning.

MRS. RIORDAN (*sitting down, almost crying*): But why? You've only just come. Is it a new play?

HUGH: No.

MRS. RIORDAN: Then what is it? Oh Hugh, I've been looking forward to your coming for so long.

HUGH: I know. Darling, I've a better idea. You'll come back to London with me.

MRS. RIORDAN: But—but——

HUGH: Don't you remember, two years ago, the swell time we had?

MRS. RIORDAN: I couldn't go now. Jack's going to have a baby—I mean his wife is, I must be here. What's happened? What have we done?

HUGH: Nothing. At least *you've* done nothing. But the place!

MRS. RIORDAN: The place? The town?

HUGH: Yes, Knock. Kay, en, o, cee, kay. My God, as I walked up from the station I could feel it closing in on me with every letter of its dull name. Its drabness, its lifelessness, dullness, dead.

MRS. RIORDAN: Of course, I suppose, after London——

HUGH: I said to myself in London, after the crashing failure of my play, "Oh, to get home again, to have some peace, to collect one's thoughts, to find a new subject, to find inspiration!" What a fool I was. I had forgotten my Knock. I realized in my five minutes' walk from the station that this place is as dead as a door-nail.

MRS. RIORDAN: You're just tired, Hugh, you're imagining things——

HUGH: I am not. I couldn't imagine anything in connection with Knock.

[*The newspaper is suddenly slapped down, and we see AUNT MOLL. She is a little old woman, over seventy, plainly but not eccentrically dressed.*]

AUNT MOLL: That's the truest word you've spoken yet, Hugh me boy. You've no imagination.

HUGH (*good-temperedly*): I forgot you were there, Aunt Moll.

AUNT MOLL: Oh, everyone forgets Aunt Moll, but I'm here most of the time.

MRS. RIORDAN: Well, indeed, we don't forget you. What a thing to say.

AUNT MOLL: With all the grand goings on to-night there'll be little thought for Aunt Moll. All I asked for was me usual glass of milk and me two Marie biscuits, but could I get them? Oh, dear me, no. Jellies and trifles galore, but no glass of plain milk for poor old Aunt Moll.

MRS. RIORDAN: I'll see you get them.

AUNT MOLL: You needn't trouble then. I made Maggie leave them on the sideboard for me. If you want a thing done, do it yourself.

HUGH: Or rather, get Maggie to do it for you.

AUNT MOLL: Humph!

MRS. RIORDAN (*laughing*): As if you didn't rule the house.

AUNT MOLL: Humph!

HUGH: And so I've no imagination? That's a funny accusation to bring against a writer of stories and plays.

AUNT MOLL: You have not. Not an ounce of it. Walking up from the station and finding Church Street dead, moyah!

HUGH: Yes, dead. Dead as mutton.

MRS. RIORDAN: It's early-closing day—no, it isn't.

AUNT MOLL: And would you say the same thing of Station Street and Main Street?

HUGH: Deader.

AUNT MOLL: You're a fool.

MRS. RIORDAN: Aunt Moll !

HUGH: Oh, let her fire away, Mother.

AUNT MOLL: I'm sorry, Kate, but a fool is what he is. I tell you, me boy, there's comedy and tragedy trailing their skirts through the mud of Church Street if you'd only the eyes to see them. But, oh no, not at all ! You must needs write about high London society, night-clubs, cock-tail parties, things you know as much about as—as me boot. And what good does it do you ? I don't suppose you've earned a hundred pounds in the seven years you've been in London.

HUGH: I got money down for my last play.

AUNT MOLL: And it ran a week.

HUGH: Anyway, it's not altogether a question of what one earns——

AUNT MOLL: Faith, I think it is. The proof of the pudding is the currants in it.

MRS. RIORDAN: It is not, Aunt Moll. Neither Joseph nor I grudge the little bit of money it costs to keep Hugh in London. We all know he's a steady boy, doesn't gamble or drink. What we spend on him is money invested and well invested. Even if he doesn't make a fortune for himself there's the books he writes and the plays——

AUNT MOLL: Not many people seem to want to see them—or read them.

MRS. RIORDAN: That's a very unkind thing to say.

HUGH: I don't mind what you say, Aunt Moll, but Mother does. So give it a rest.

AUNT MOLL: I don't want to be unkind, Kate ; you know I'm fond of the child, I know he has talent. That's why it drives me near crazy to hear him saying a stupid thing like that. Church Street dead ! Ha, ha !

HUGH: I wish you'd show me where it's alive.

AUNT MOLL: And I could too. I could tell you——

*[A noise of voices and laughter outside.]*



MRS. RIORDAN: Goodness gracious, can this be them? (*She looks at her watch.*) It is, it's half-seven.

[*The door at the back opens and admits JACK, MOLLIE, MISS PETTIGREW, MRS. DE LACY, SALLIE LONG, JIM DALY and HONOR BEWLEY. JACK (HUGH's brother) is an ordinary, stocky, cheerful young man. His wife MOLLIE is a pretty ordinary young woman, rather swaggering in the fact that she is going to have a baby at the first legitimate moment. MISS PETTIGREW is quite old and dressed almost fantastically in a semi-evening dress of thirty years ago; her sister, MRS. DE LACY, is a little older, but very quietly and decently dressed in black. SALLIE LONG is a charming girl of twenty-two or twenty-three. JIM DALY is an odd, clever-looking fellow of twenty-six or twenty-seven. HONOR BEWLEY is about the same age, dressed in a simple black dress. All come in awkwardly, in a bunch, and having got in don't quite know what to do with themselves. The scene which follows must be so well produced that it gives the impression of not having been produced at all. People must move when they should not, mask each other, speak through each other's speeches—and yet every speech must be heard—the audience should say to each other, "What bad acting, what rotten production."*]

JACK: The whole bunch of us met on the doorstep, Mother. Hello, Hugh, back again; fine to see you.

HUGH (*shaking hands*): How are you, Jack?

JACK: Meet your new sister-in-law. Come here, Mollie. Where at all have you got to?

MOLLIE (*extricating herself from the little crowd*): Here I am. How-do-you-do, Hugh? I suppose I can call you that.

HUGH: Of course, I'm delighted to meet you at last.

MOLLIE: Yes, you were a swine not to come over to give Jack away——

HUGH: I had a play——

[*His sentence is drowned by MRS. RIORDAN's greetings.*]

MRS. RIORDAN: How are you, Mrs. de Lacy? You're looking frozen. Come near the fire. Oh, and what a pretty dress, Sarah. (*This to MISS PETTIGREW.*)

MISS PETTIGREW: Such an old rag.

MRS. RIORDAN: I don't believe it. It looks the latest thing.



JACK (*to HUGH*): Well, you'll have to come over for the christening—or stay over for it. Won't he, Mollie?

HUGH: Christening?

JACK: You're to be godfather. We fixed that, didn't we, Mollie, and if it's a boy we're going to call it Hugh, after the genius of the family.

MOLLIE: And if it's a girl—Moll—

JACK: After the demon of the family.

MRS. RIORDAN: Jack, please! Hugh, you haven't forgotten Miss Pettigrew?

HUGH (*shaking hands*): Of course not.

MISS PETTIGREW (*simpering*): Indeed, I don't know why you should remember—Such an old woman now. Years and years. And this is my sister—Lucy!

MRS. DE LACY (*approaching*): You wanted me, Sarah?

MISS PETTIGREW: This is Hugh. My sister, Mrs. de Lacy.

HUGH: How-do-you-do? (MRS. DE LACY *bows*.)

MISS PETTIGREW: I don't think you've seen her since she was a child—no, I mean since you were a teeny, weeny child with the loveliest curls I ever saw. She married into Carlow you know, and then the beet came and her husband died and—

MRS. DE LACY: I'm sure, Sarah, Mr. Hugh doesn't want to hear all that. You were in your pram when I saw you last. You *have* grown.

HUGH: Yes, I suppose I have.

MRS. DE LACY: I remember you distinctly, but I do *not* remember any curls. My recollection is that you were entirely bald.

MISS PETTIGREW: Oh, not bald, Lucy. Fluff. Down.

MRS. DE LACY: Bald.

HUGH: Probably.

MRS. RIORDAN (*bringing SALLIE forward*); And here is Miss Long. She's a new-comer, the rector's daughter.

HUGH: How-do-you-do?

SALLIE: How-do-you-do?

MISS PETTIGREW: Such a nice man, Hugh, only been in the town for a year. Came from somewhere near Lismore, didn't he, Sallie?

SALLIE: Yes, Miss Pettigrew.

MRS. DE LACY: On our honeymoon my husband and I *did* the valley of the Blackwater.

SALLIE: Really?

HUGH: Charming.

MISS PETTIGREW: I've always heard that Lismore Castle——

*[Their conversation is lost for a moment; it is presumably about scenery and the Duke of Devonshire. Above the other conversation AUNT MOLL's voice is heard; she is talking to JIM DALY.]*

AUNT MOLL: No, James Daly, there is no use in your trying to ram down my throat the fact that you are a medical student in your last year—almost a doctor. I do not approve of inoculation. I stand where I have always stood, right beside Mr. George Bernard Shaw.

JIM: Lucky George! But the statistics——

AUNT MOLL: Prove nothing. Or anything you want them to prove. Don't talk to me of your statistics. Come up to my room.

JIM: No, really!

HONOR: You ought to. Aunt Moll's room is a treasure-house.

MRS. RIORDAN: Come here, Jim. You and Hugh used to be great chums before you went to the National.

JIM (*going to HUGH and shaking hands*): Hallo, old man.

HUGH: Hallo, Jim. Nice to see you again.

JIM: I read about you in the papers from time to time. You're quite a person in literary London, aren't you? Makes me feel cocky to think that we were both at Rockwell together.

HUGH: Cocky? Rot. I'm a bloody failure. It's you that are getting the gold medals.

MRS. RIORDAN: Now you've met everyone, I think. Oh no,

there's Honor hiding in the background. You don't need any introduction to *her*.

HUGH: No indeed. (*He crosses to meet her and shakes hands with her. There is a forced brightness and cordiality in his manner.*) How are you, Honor?

HONOR (*quite friendly and composed*): How-do-you-do, Hugh? It's nice for your mother to have you back.

HUGH: Oh yes.

HONOR: I was reading about your play. It was such a shame it wasn't more successful, it sounded so interesting. Of course I don't know anything about those sort of people but——

[*The rest of the conversation fades because AUNT MOLL tops it; she is talking to MOLLIE.*]

AUNT MOLL: I hope you take a good rest every afternoon. That's a very important thing. *I know.*

JACK (*laughing*): How could you know, Aunt Moll?

AUNT MOLL: I do. And another thing—James Daly, come here. Although I thoroughly disapprove of your views on inoculation and vivisection I think that you and I could tell this young woman that if she wants—no, don't run away—(*she pursues her to a corner of the room and captures her*).

HUGH (*to HONOR*): I was so sorry to hear of your bereavement. I meant to have written, but you know how it is.

HONOR: Poor father. He suffered so much. It was what is called a "blessed release."

HUGH (*always speaking with a little restraint*): You have your nice house still? You're going to stay on there?

HONOR: It's being auctioned next week.

HUGH: Oh, I say! You don't mean that—that he left you——?

HONOR: He left me plenty of money and that lovely old house.

HUGH: Then—then why?

[*Before she can answer MISS PETTIGREW is at HUGH's elbow.*]

MISS PETTIGREW: We hear you've had a play on the boards in London and that it was a tremendous success.

HUGH : It ran a week *and* two matinees.

MISS PETTIGREW : Isn't that magnificent ? The one the Temperance Society put on at the Town Hall only ran two nights, though it was very good, I believe. Of course I couldn't go, my sister still being in mourning ; only two years since Bob, my brother-in-law, died ; a moving clot they said it was, very sad for all concerned. Of course I know that nowadays people go out of mourning faster than they go into it, but we're old-fashioned people, my sister and I, and——

MRS. DE LACY : Sarah !

MISS PETTIGREW : Am I talking too much, Lucy ?

MRS. DE LACY : You are.

MISS PETTIGREW : I always was a bit of a rattle-tongue.

MRS. DE LACY : You were.

MISS PETTIGREW : You're always so grim with me, Lucy.

HONOR : You've the kindest tongue and the kindest heart in the town, Miss Pettigrew.

MISS PETTIGREW : Have I, dear ? Thank you. And you've the prettiest face.

MRS. RIORDAN (*taking the floor*) : I think we should go in to tea at once and not wait for Mr. Riordan.

HONOR : Where is he, Mrs. Riordan ?

MRS. RIORDAN : He's playing golf.

JACK : Playing in the Captain's prize ; he's bound to be late.

AUNT MOLL : The Captain's prize ! We all know what that means.

SALLIE LONG : Daddie's playing too.

AUNT MOLL : Oh, your father's all right. Band of Hope. But that nineteenth hole—— !

JIM : You know everything, Miss Riordan.

AUNT MOLL : I don't play golf, thank God, but I'm not a fool. (*To MOLLIE*) I hear you've made Jack give up his golf ?

MOLLIE : Yes, he gardens instead.

AUNT MOLL : Splendid. That bending. So good for the liver.



MOLLIE: And he's taken up his singing again.

JACK: I really only married her because I thought she might be able to play my accompaniments.

MOLLIE: Quite so, my dear.

AUNT MOLL: Jack had the makings of a good voice. (*She turns to him with perhaps the first touch of softness she has shown.*) Will you sing to me to-night, me dear? Nothing very old and nothing very new, just something seventyish or eightyish—like meself.

JACK (*taking a small pile of songs from the piano where he had laid them down when he came in*): I don't know if there's anything here you'd like. There are piles of others in the press.

AUNT MOLL (*turning them over*): "Bois Epais"—too smug and dreary. "The Erl-king"—you haven't guts enough to sing that properly. "So we'll go no more a-roving." Where did you get that?

JACK: It's an old song now, but still quite well known and a fine song. The music is by Maude Valerie White.

AUNT MOLL: I don't know it. I only know the poem, the most heartbreaking he ever wrote.

JACK: Who wrote? I never looked at the author of the words.

AUNT MOLL: Of course you didn't. He was called George Gordon Byron.

JACK: Oh—Byron? Did I learn him at school?

AUNT MOLL: It doesn't matter—for all the good it seems to have done you. How does it go? Hum it to me.

JACK (*he sings very softly into her ear, so that it doesn't disturb the conversation in the room*):

So, we'll go no more a-roving  
So late into the night,  
Though the heart——

[MR. RIORDAN comes in. Middle-aged, genial. Plus-fours.

RIORDAN: Hallo, everyone.

MRS. RIORDAN: We were just giving you up, Joseph.

[*She rings a bell.*



RIORDAN: I'm not so late. Playing in the Captain's prize, you know. I tied for second place. That damned parson won.—Oh, beg pardon, Miss Long, didn't see you, but you know that your father and I are the best of friends; damned decent fellow. Hallo, Hugh. Sorry couldn't get to the station to meet you, but Captain's prize, you know, couldn't be missed. How's London and all that? Gaiety girls, ha-ha! Ah, Mrs. de Lacy, I've a little letter for you downstairs in the office—don't let me let you go without giving it to you; and there's your sister looking as pretty as a picture—you should have been my little mascot to-day, waved success to me from the pavilion; and Honor—you look half a nun already, bless you, my dear; and there's my old witch of an aunt with her broomstick parked in the landing—and Jim—your father wasn't out this afternoon, scratched at the last minute.

JIM: He's not feeling too fit—a touch of flu.

[RIORDAN *is only a little tipsy, and everyone on his journey round the room has met him very kindly and more than half-way.*

MRS. RIORDAN: I've rung for tea.

RIORDAN: Good. I'm as hungry as a hunter.

AUNT MOLL (*ominously*): Not *thirsty*, I expect.

RIORDAN: No, not thirst—yes, *very* thirsty.

AUNT MOLL: Humph!

MRS. RIORDAN: Well, by the time we're sitting down Maggie will have the tea and coffee up, so come along everyone. It's the simplest sort of cold supper——

[*Babbling other courteous words she shoos them to the door on the L. HUGH hangs back and AUNT MOLL doesn't move.*

MRS. RIORDAN: Hugh, aren't you coming?

HUGH: Give me just a minute to finish this cigarette.

MRS. RIORDAN: Well, don't be long.

MISS PETTIGREW (*as she goes out*): You're our lion to-night, you know.

AUNT MOLL: Send me in me milk and biscuits, Kate. I couldn't bear to go in there and see you all gulping blancmange.

MRS. RIORDAN: Very well, Aunt Moll.

[*They all go into the next room except HUGH and AUNT MOLL.*]

AUNT MOLL: She'll forget, oh, she'll forget, she never remembers anything for more than five seconds. Oh well, Aunt Moll has the use of her own legs still, thank God; she can fetch her own milk and biscuits. A kind, feckless woman, that's what Kate is. She wouldn't even quench some of the lights. All that Shannon business has just led to extravagance and waste. Shannon scheme—oh, "scheme" is the word. (*She puts out all the lights except a bracket at the fireplace.*) That's enough light for you to smoke by, and it's enough light for me to read by while I sup me glass of milk.

HUGH: Yes. . . . (*Standing in front of the fire and waving his hand towards the door through which the company has disappeared*) Well, there you are.

AUNT MOLL: How do you mean "There I are"?

HUGH: There's Knock for you. There's your comedy and tragedy—what was your ornamental phrase?—"trailing their skirts through the mud of Church Street."

[*He laughs.*]

AUNT MOLL: There *you* are—if you only had the eyes to see it.

HUGH: I see them.

AUNT MOLL: You don't.

HUGH: I grant you they're all nice decent people.

AUNT MOLL (*with contempt*): Nice decent people!

HUGH: Do you mean to say they're not all nice and decent?

AUNT MOLL (*quietly and seriously*): I tell you, Hugh, there's a mo'rt of tragedy and comedy sitting round that table in the next room—more tragedy than comedy, I'm sorry to say.

HUGH: You're joking.

AUNT MOLL: I wish I was.

HUGH: What's tragic about any of them—except their awful provincialism?

AUNT MOLL: There are three plays for you there, maybe four, if you only had the guts to feel them and the eyes to see them.

HUGH: Plays? Ah, go on! I don't believe you for a minute.

AUNT MOLL (*thoughtful, not dictating*): Of course you'd have to select, choose what you'd take and what you'd leave aside. Didn't someone say that genius was the art of selection? And you're no genius. You'd have to—sort of shape your material, just a little, a very little would be enough. Maybe you couldn't—maybe no dramatist could make that company inside into a play. Maybe it's only through the cinema you could catch it all, all the different stories, interlocking, moving away from each other, moving back to each other again, like figures in the lancers.

HUGH: Lancers?

AUNT MOLL: Maybe you're too young to have ever danced them. A figure dance, rowdy in a drawing-room. I've seen them danced in a kitchen in County Limerick, as dignified as an eighteenth-century minuet.

HUGH: Mother's party to-night seemed just a huddle of people, talking together anyhow and all getting in each other's way.

AUNT MOLL: I know. No construction. No stage-management. But, God Almighty, boy, that's your job.

HUGH: My job?

AUNT MOLL: As a dramatist. To put some shape, some stage-shape, on real life.

HUGH: Maybe. If there was only a subject there.

AUNT MOLL: I've told you. You have your choice of three or four.

HUGH: And I can't see even one.

AUNT MOLL: They tell me you're good at comedy, and I'm afraid there's not much comedy there—

HUGH: Oh come! Old Pettigrew and her sister.

AUNT MOLL: Hm, yes. But not as funny as they seem. There's your brother Jack and his wife—you'd better keep them in for the sake of normality, though it's a bit ironic

that Jack, who was such a boyo, should be spancelled and tamed by that Mollie girl. Making him give up golf and take to gardening ! Jack, who'd only recognize cabbage when it's boiled round a pig's head ! Ha, ha ! Oh, they're all right. They'll have a string of children, and Jack will die contentedly in his bed, aged eighty.

HUGH: You see; no play there.

AUNT MOLL: There's your father and mother——

HUGH: Normal again. The nicest people in the world, but utterly normal.

AUNT MOLL: Well, your father does take a drop too much now and again. I thought to-night he was distinctly elevated.

HUGH: Nonsense. And even if he was—the Captain's match. I have seen him tipsy but not enough to make a song and dance about it, and if you think I'm going to put my own father on the stage and show him drunk——

AUNT MOLL: Charles Dickens put his father in a book and didn't show him up so well. But no; I suppose we'll have to leave Joseph out, he doesn't get raging drunk, and, of course, poor Kate's a rock of morality—did she send me in me milk ?

HUGH: No. Don't mind it for a minute. I'll get it. Go on. This is beginning to interest me.

AUNT MOLL: You ought to make yourself the villain of the play.

HUGH: I ? What, under heaven, have I done ?

AUNT MOLL: You, and Honor Bewley.

HUGH: Honor ?

AUNT MOLL: Don't pretend to be so surprised. You broke her heart.

HUGH: I don't believe it.

AUNT MOLL: You did, when you went off to London seven years ago and left her behind.

HUGH: Nonsense. We were never engaged. There was nothing between us.



AUNT MOLL: There was everything between you except the one word "Honor, will you marry me?" Do you remember how gay she was long ago, and look at her now. That's what your seven years' desertion has done.

HUGH: I have nothing to do with her looks. She's had a hard time, nursing her paralysed father. That aged her, naturally.

AUNT MOLL: If she'd been married to you, she'd have thrown over her father, paralysed and all as he was. What is it Mr. Shaw says? "Girls withering into ladies." Oh, but Honor Bewley's the withered lady.

HUGH: I don't believe you for a minute. She met me to-night without a flicker of embarrassment, she was icily calm.

AUNT MOLL: Don't you know why? . . . Ah, use your imagination, man. Don't you know what it's in her head to do?

HUGH: No. . . . (*Something dawns on him.*) I don't want to know. I mean—I mean——

AUNT MOLL: You're afraid.

HUGH (*shaking it off*): Oh, let's fish round somewhere else. Let's be gay, macabre if you like. What about old Pettigrew and her monumental sister?

AUNT MOLL: Yes, make them as monumental as you like, but don't forget that there's something behind Sarah Pettigrew's gazebo of a dress.

HUGH (*laughing*): A broken heart?

AUNT MOLL: No. An empty stomach.

HUGH (*sobered*): Oh!

AUNT MOLL: I don't know for certain, Hugh, but I believe that those two women are hungry half the time. You know, apart from the big old house they have rent-free for the rest of their lives, they never had much money in their pockets; but they were the most generous creatures in the world—at least Sarah was; we don't know so much about the Lucy one. No beggar was ever turned from their door without a square meal and a shilling in his pocket. Well, now I hear there's neither bread nor a shilling for the decentest



tinker walking the roads. I think they were living on the bit that came from the railways or some investments of the sort, but since they've failed—well, your father would know, he handles their investments, but of course I couldn't ask him. There's something to catch hold of there, Hugh.

HUGH: By Jove, yes. But it can't be true.

AUNT MOLL: People are hungry, Hugh, even in Knock, not only on the London Embankment. Didn't you notice the sort of grey look on their faces?

HUGH: No.

AUNT MOLL: That's what I'm telling you. You've no eyes, no imagination.

HUGH: I'll look closer next time. Well, who'd think that my oddities should turn out to be half-tragic figures? But when I write my play I'll keep them in for a kind of macabre relief. I'll have to get my nice fun, my romance, out of Jim Daly and Miss—I forget her name, but they seemed a bit gone on each other.

AUNT MOLL: Sallie Long. The rector's daughter.

HUGH: Oh yes. So she was.

AUNT MOLL: The rector's daughter and Jim Daly—in love with one another. Doesn't that suggest something to you?

HUGH: I don't think so.

AUNT MOLL: Don't you remember how great Jim's people always were with the Church? One uncle a Monsignor and the other a P.P. in Liverpool; two aunts nuns, and Jim himself, though he is a medical student, not wild at all, not likely to do anything rash, anything that would go against his family and his religion.

HUGH: You mean he'd like to marry her if she wasn't a Protestant?

AUNT MOLL: They're dying down about each other, and she won't go against *her* religion. We must give in, Hugh, that now and again Protestants are as hot on their faith as we are on ours. The thing is breaking their hearts.

HUGH: God!

AUNT MOLL: The whole town knows of it; I'm not making it up, 'tis the laugh of every public-house. Old Daly is

threatening all sorts. Poor Mrs. Daly is just amiable, bewildered, the creature. What's to be the end of it, God alone knows.

HUGH: One or the other will give in.

AUNT MOLL: Neither will give in, they're both too proud. . . . I hear there's talk of her going to London.

HUGH: To forget him? I see. A good idea.

AUNT MOLL (*darkly*): Maybe.

HUGH: Maybe? If not for that reason, why?

AUNT MOLL: I don't know, and I wouldn't tell you if I did. . . . Well, there's bits of a play for you, Hugh.

HUGH: Yes, but only bits. I'd have to bring you in to bind it all together.

AUNT MOLL: Let you leave me out of it.

HUGH: Indeed I won't. What are you, Aunt Moll? Comedy or tragedy?

AUNT MOLL: Just a cantankerous old woman.

HUGH: Yes, of course. But something else.

AUNT MOLL: Melodrama.

HUGH: I don't believe it.

AUNT MOLL: I've shot me man.

HUGH: Aunt Moll! A *crime passionel*?

AUNT MOLL: Not at all. A Black-and-Tan.

HUGH: Good God! I think I'm going crazy.

AUNT MOLL: I shot him through the heart. Oh, none of your dirty shoot-him-in-the-back jobs for Aunt Moll. . . . There's a hat-box under me bed.

HUGH: What's in it?

AUNT MOLL (*with a chuckle*): A relic. Human.

HUGH: Merciful heavens! And you used to teach me my catechism! (*He gets up; he is anywhere about the room; he is fearfully excited.*) You're right, you're right, there's a play here somewhere. I don't quite know where, I don't quite know with whom, I'll have to fish round, try here and there, get them back, not really back, I only mean back in my mind—and in yours, Aunt Moll for you must help me But

I don't want everyone together, just two or three at a time. . . . I think I'm beginning to see it now . . . those starving old women . . . and Sallie Long and London . . . how frightful . . . how perfectly ghastly. . . . But it's inevitable—or is it? Is it all in my own mind or must it—must it happen? Am I shaping events or are they shaping me? Is it all predestined? (*He raises his voice and speaks with a harsh, unnatural note.*) Will you all stand by, please. I'll summon you as I need you. We'll sit over this side, Aunt Moll. I must see them on the stage as I see them in my mind. I'll alter the lights and arrange the furniture as I go along.

AUNT MOLL: Use your imagination, Hugh.

HUGH: I'll try to.

[*He switches off all the lights and in the darkness pilots her to the extreme L. of the stage. They sit on two chairs, facing diagonally from lower L. corner to upper R. A faint light comes up. The back wall of the room has disappeared and has been replaced by a wall somewhat similar to it but with a bench about four feet from the ground stretching across it, and on the bench are sitting all the characters we have seen earlier in the play with the exception of JACK and MOLLIE. They sit quite motionless, like dummy figures, we see them dimly.*]

HUGH (*surveying them*): Yes, that will do. . . . I don't think we need take it right from the beginning, Aunt Moll, I mean the bit about my coming down here and telling mother I'm not staying—oh but I say, I can't do myself, I've got to stage-manage, construct. Besides I want to imagine a young man, much more attractive than I am . . . a little tragic-looking . . . yes, that's it.

[*As if evoked, a young man is standing by the fire.*]

And now, Mother—you've gone out of the room by this time, Aunt Moll, to get your bally milk.

AUNT MOLL: I've told you, I don't want to be in the play at all.

HUGH: What a hope! Just you wait!

[*During these two sentences MRS. RIORDAN has come from the bench and taken her place beside the Evoked HUGH. The scenes which follow with the evoked characters should, if possible, be a little different in production from the scenes with the natural*]

*characters, the speeches a little slower and more deliberate, the movements slightly stagey.*

EV. HUGH: No, I'm not staying.

MRS. RIORDAN: Not staying?

EV. HUGH: Just till to-morrow morning.

MRS. RIORDAN: But why? You've only just come. Is it a new play? Is that why you've got to rush back to London?

EV. HUGH: No.

MRS. RIORDAN: Then what is it? Oh, Hugh, I've looked forward to this visit of yours for so long.

EV. HUGH: I know, but——

REAL HUGH: I'll break it there. Honor!

EV. HUGH: I know, but——

MRS. RIORDAN: Hush. Someone's arrived. Don't make up your mind yet, Hugh, we'll talk of it later.

REAL HUGH: And now for Honor.

*[HONOR BEWLEY has got off the bench and comes in through the door.]*

MRS. RIORDAN: Ah, how are you, my dear?

HONOR (*shaking hands*): Am I the first?

MRS. RIORDAN: Yes, but what matter? You can have a nice chat with Hugh before all the others arrive.

HONOR: How do you do, Hugh?

EV. HUGH (*meeting her awkwardly*): How are you, Honor?

HONOR: It's quite a long time since we've seen you.

EV. HUGH: Four years.

MRS. RIORDAN: Will you excuse me, Honor dear, if I just slip into the dining-room and have a look at the supper-table? Maggie's as good as gold, but forgetful.

*[She goes out.]*

HONOR (*smiling*): Your mother was always diplomatic.

EV. HUGH: I was so sorry to hear of your bereavement. I meant to have written—but you know how it is.



HONOR: Of course. You were so busy with your writing. I quite understood.

Ev. HUGH: You're looking——

*[He pauses for a word.]*

HONOR: Older? Tired?

Ev. HUGH: Well—grave. Very grave.

HONOR: I'll try not to be at your party. I'm sure I am looking old and tired, but father's was such a long illness and I nursed him myself. He suffered so much, his death was what is called a "blessed release."

Ev. HUGH: Mother told me that he left you quite well off and you still have the nice house. You'll live on there, of course?

HONOR: It's being auctioned next week.

Ev. HUGH: Honor! Why?

HONOR: Oh, I have other plans.

Ev. HUGH (*laughing*): I believe you're going to get married.

HONOR (*pained*): Hugh!

Ev. HUGH: I shouldn't have said that. I'm sorry.

HONOR: It doesn't matter. . . . Listen, Hugh, after the next few days I shall never see you again.

Ev. HUGH: Honor!

HONOR: Never again. So for your sake—for both our sakes—I want to say something to you quite frankly. You remember I had barely met you till I was over seventeen. I was away at school or you were away at school. I was a very religious girl; I wanted to be a nun; I thought I had a vocation, I still think I had a vocation, and father didn't object and then—and then——

Ev. HUGH: And then I came along.

HONOR: Exactly. You came along. It was fun for you those long summer holidays and the Christmas after.

Ev. HUGH: I loved you very much, Honor, I did indeed.

HONOR: I know you thought you did; but when there was a question of your going to London and being very poor and having to make your own way——



EV. HUGH: I couldn't bear the idea of being spangled and strangled by an engagement of marriage. I couldn't, Honor, I couldn't. That evening, walking home from the dance at the Bank—do you remember?—(*she nods*), I was going to London the next day, it was on the tip of my tongue to ask you to marry me, and I just managed not to; and I came home and threw myself on my bed and said, "I'm free, I'm free, thank God, I'm still free."

HONOR: I was free too, but I didn't want to be free. And you hardly ever wrote, so I knew it was all over. And then I set myself to forget you, and it took me a few years, but I succeeded at last; and now you are less to me than any stranger I might pass in the street. I suppose you "broke my heart" as they used to say, but it's mended again; and now that father's dead I'm free to do what I should have done after I left school.

EV. HUGH: You mean—become a nun?

HONOR: Yes.

EV. HUGH: You make me feel an awful brute.

HONOR: You needn't feel that. I think you should never forget the rather mean way you treated me; but maybe it was for the best, for if I had been a nun I couldn't have looked after poor father. Anyway, all's over now, Hugh, and let's shake hands quickly as old friends before the others come in.

*[She holds out her hand.]*

EV. HUGH: Honor, perhaps even still——

HONOR: Nonsense. You're quite out of my heart. God bless you, Hugh; may you be as happy as I shall be.

*[She shakes his hand warmly.]*

MR. RIORDAN *comes in; he has been drinking, and it makes him excited and brusque.*

MR. RIORDAN: Hallo. What are you two colloquing about? Sorry, Honor. I should have shaken hands with you, but I'm a bit put out this evening. What do you think of this fine lad of mine?

HONOR: I think he's looking very well, Mr. Riordan.

MR. RIORDAN: Yes, why shouldn't he? Living on the fat of the land in London. Wish I had the chance of getting away for a bit.

HONOR: You have been looking pulled down for the last couple of months.

MR. RIORDAN: Nonsense. Never better, never better. Where's your mother, Hugh? I must see Kate. Business. I've to telephone to Dublin at once.

HONOR: I'll get her, Mr. Riordan, she's in the dining-room, I think.

EV. HUGH: No, let me go.

HONOR: Don't bother.

MR. RIORDAN: Yes, both of you go if you don't mind. It's a little bit of private business—nothing important, you know, but private.

[EV. HUGH *opens the door for HONOR and she goes out.*

EV. HUGH *gives his father a searching look.*

MR. RIORDAN (*resenting it*): You think I've been drinking? Well, I have, and so would you if you were in my shoes.

EV. HUGH: I'm sorry. Can I do anything—help in any way?

MR. RIORDAN: No, you can't. But thanks all the same.

[EV. HUGH *goes out.*

AUNT MOLL: I don't like this, Hugh. Joseph isn't a bad boy.

HUGH: Hush, Aunt Moll. Remember it's half play-acting.

[MRS. RIORDAN *comes in.*

MRS. RIORDAN: You wanted me, Joseph?

MR. RIORDAN: Yes. You know those Blenkinsop shares you have?

MRS. RIORDAN: Blenkinsop?

MR. RIORDAN: Yes; Blenkinsop, Blenkinsop. I want you to lend them to me; I must raise some money on them at once.

MRS. RIORDAN: Oh.

MR. RIORDAN: I'll be able to give them back to you in a couple of months.

[MRS. RIORDAN *says nothing.*

You trust me, don't you? You don't think I'm going to make away with them?

MRS. RIORDAN: Of course not. But—but I haven't got them.

MR. RIORDAN: Not got them?

MRS. RIORDAN: I sold them, three months ago.

MR. RIORDAN: Behind my back, without telling me a word?

MRS. RIORDAN: Yes, Joseph.

MR. RIORDAN: In the name of Heaven, why? What have you been doing?

MRS. RIORDAN: Nothing wrong, Joseph, but I knew you'd be angry. It was for Hugh.

MR. RIORDAN: Hugh? What did he want money for? Hadn't he his allowance? Debts?

MRS. RIORDAN: 'No, it was money for his play. He could only get it on by putting some money into it himself and, of course, he hadn't a penny beyond his little allowance. (MR. RIORDAN *sits down, collapsed.*) You're not angry with me, Joseph?

MR. RIORDAN: No, I'm not angry, I'm beyond that.

MRS. RIORDAN: You're frightening me. What's happened?

MR. RIORDAN: I've been a blasted fool, Kate. I've been worse. A criminal. I've been gambling with other people's money.

MRS. RIORDAN: Joseph!

MR. RIORDAN: Miss Pettigrew's and her sister's, of all unfortunate people. I thought I could double their money for them—no, I didn't really do it for their sakes; if I'd doubled it I'd have kept the makings for myself—and now, unless I can find three hundred pounds by to-morrow morning it's all gone.

MRS. RIORDAN: Ah, the poor women!

MR. RIORDAN: They won't starve, I won't let them starve anyway. Oh, my God, what a fool I've been, what a blasted fool.

MRS. RIORDAN: I've thirty or more pounds in the bank, Joseph.

MR. RIORDAN: Yes, I'll use that to go on with, and then I'll think of some way—there must be some way.

[JIM and SALLIE come in, there are mutual greetings.]

MR. RIORDAN (*irritably*): Are we all here? Can't we have supper now, Kate. I'm starving.

MRS. RIORDAN: I'm expecting a couple more, dear.

MR. RIORDAN: Who?

MRS. RIORDAN: Miss—Miss Pettigrew and Mrs. de Lacy.

MR. RIORDAN: Oh, my God!

JIM: You say that as if you didn't like them, as if you weren't their best friend—which they always swear you are.

SALLIE: Friend? Why, Jim—you've been away in Dublin, but if you could see the way Mr. Riordan flirts with Miss Pettigrew at the badminton, it's—it's quite shameless. I wonder you allow it, Mrs. Riordan.

MRS. RIORDAN (*trying to smile*): I know, dear. Shocking, isn't it? But—you're not looking quite yourself. Are you feeling quite well?

SALLIE (*quickly, brazening it out*): Never felt fitter, Mrs. Riordan. Running round a little too much perhaps.

MRS. RIORDAN: You should take care of yourself. (*Taking in JIM with her eyes.*) Ah yes, of course.

MR. RIORDAN (*slapping JIM on the back*): Young people will be young people.

JIM (*uncomfortable*): Yes, yes. Playing golf to-day, Mr. Riordan?

MR. RIORDAN: No, Jim. Too busy, too busy. I forgot, aren't Jack and Mollie coming?

MRS. RIORDAN: Not till after supper, Joseph.

[*The door opens and HUGH admits MISS PETTIGREW and her sister.*]

MISS PETTIGREW: We met Mr. Hugh in the hall—how do you do, Mrs. Riordan? My sister says he's grown. Sallie,

my dear (*she kisses her*), and Jim, of course, never very far away, ha, ha ! And there's Mr. Riordan hiding from me, positively hiding from me. I see you, you naughty man ; come here and shake hands with me. (*He comes forward unwillingly.*) Hold up your head ! I believe Kate has been giving you a good dressing-down, and I'm sure you deserved it. Have you, Kate ?

[MRS. DE LACY *meanwhile is making proper salutations.*

MRS. RIORDAN : No, oh no.

MISS PETTIGREW : Of course you couldn't. None of us could have the heart to do anything or say anything against dear Mr. Riordan, our best friend, our oldest friend.

[HONOR *opens the dining-room door.*

HONOR : Supper's ready now, Mrs. Riordan.

MRS. RIORDAN : Thank you, dear. Come along everyone.

[*And, talking easily and moving easily, they all go into the dining-room and the door is shut.*

AUNT MOLL : And that, I suppose, properly worked up, is your first act ?

HUGH : I'm not sure. I'd like to run the play straight through in a series of little scenes.

AUNT MOLL : Taking how long ?

HUGH : Maybe an hour, maybe an hour and a half.

AUNT MOLL : Nonsense. No audience would stand it. Not an audience of men anyway. Never can sit for more than half an hour without wanting a smoke or a drink or—or something. No self-control.

HUGH : They stick it at the pictures. I'll try them anyway. The fact is, Aunt Moll, you've no self-control ; you are dying for your milk.

AUNT MOLL : Of course I am. It's beyond me hour.

HUGH (*going towards the dining-room door*) : I'll get it for you.

AUNT MOLL (*calling after him*) : And me Marie biscuits.

HUGH (*disappearing*) : You'll get them.

AUNT MOLL : The creature. His mother all over. Feckless. I'll warrant he'll forget the biscuits—or the milk ; no



system, no imagination. Ah well, I've me *Manchester Guardian*.

[*She picks up the paper but before she has time to start to read it HUGH is back with a glass of milk, two Marie biscuits, and a glass of claret.*]

HUGH: Here's your milk, Aunt Moll, and your biscuits.

AUNT MOLL: Thank you.

[*She has a good gulp of milk.*]

HUGH (*after a sip of claret*): I know I should have used them more, those two old women, for queerities' sake. I could do them as easily as I—as I—but they're all there, in my mind. I can plug them in later on if it's necessary. Just now, just for a first draft I wanted to bring them in bare and neat—like a very dry sherry. But don't fret, Aunt Moll, I'll enrich it all later. What I want you to do now is run upstairs and get into a mackintosh and a very plain hat.

AUNT MOLL: I certainly will do nothing of the kind. At this hour of night!

HUGH: Oh yes, you will. Don't you understand, I'm master here this evening. Whatever I say, goes. I clap my hands, presto!—and you disappear.

AUNT MOLL (*going*): Well, I never!

[*She goes out.*]

*There is a sound of ping-pong balls from the dining-room, sound of people scoring and laughter. The door opens and SALLIE LONG comes in. She moves to the fire and stands there rather wearily. A few seconds later JIM DALY comes after her.*

JIM: You slipped away. Why did you? We were all so jolly.

SALLIE: Yes, you were.

JIM: Don't you like table-tennis—ping-pong or whatever they call it?

SALLIE: I used to.

JIM: Why wouldn't you play this evening?

SALLIE: Aren't you almost a doctor?

JIM: Yes. . . . I forgot, for a minute.

SALLIE: Go back to the others. They'll miss you.

JIM: They won't. I've been knocked out.

SALLIE: Still, they'll miss you.

JIM: Look here, Sallie, things can't go on like this.

SALLIE: Why not?

JIM: I'll marry you to-morrow, like a shot.

SALLIE: Yes. On the old conditions. Oh Jim, my dear, don't let's go over it all again. We've argued and argued. There's no possible solution.

JIM: You can't bring yourself to do it?

SALLIE: Turn Catholic? No. Isn't it queer that I could let myself do with you—what I did, and yet I can't go back on my faith? I could never bring myself to say that I believe in things I don't believe in, things that I hate in my heart. You can't give up your faith either. I respect you for it, respect me.

JIM: I do. You'll always be the only woman——

SALLIE: Stop. Don't make rash promises, and don't look so awfully solemn. After all, isn't it a very old story—the medical student and the clergyman's daughter? Aren't there vulgar jokes about it—or comic songs?

JIM: Oh, shut up.

SALLIE: When Jack and Mollie came in to-night there were mildly facetious jokes made about her "condition"—isn't that what it's called? Everyone was as pleased as Punch. Suppose that I went into that room this minute and told them of *my* condition, what would they say?

JIM: You wouldn't.

SALLIE: Of course not. But suppose I did and said you were the father?

JIM: But what's going to happen?

SALLIE: I'm going to London next week.

JIM: To London?

SALLIE: Well, Jim, father's awfully broadminded, but my having my bastard at the Rectory would be a little bit thick.

JIM: Who are you going to in London ?

SALLIE: School friend.

JIM: I don't believe you.

SALLIE: Well, it's an easy thing to say.

JIM: I want your address.

SALLIE: Why ? Don't you see it's all over, Jim ? (*He starts to protest.*) Oh, very well, you shall have it, but I don't promise to write.

JIM: I'll write often.

SALLIE (*sure that he won't*): I'm sure you will. When do you go back to Dublin ?

JIM: To-morrow morning.

SALLIE: Oh. . . . Then to-night is good-bye.

JIM: No, of course not.

SALLIE: Yes, it is. (*Quite lightly*) Good-bye, Jim.

JIM: You're horribly cruel.

SALLIE: I mean to be.

JIM: You're putting me in the wrong all the time.

SALLIE: I'm not, I'm not. Oh, forgive me, my dear, and—there's one thing—thank your mother from me, somehow I can't, and tell her how sweet and nice she's been. I think she'd have liked me for a daughter-in-law—if things had only been different.

JIM: I'll tell her. Father's been a beast.

SALLIE: Ah, no. Behaved just the way you'll behave to your children—your legitimate children. We'd better go back to the others, they'll be wondering.

JIM: Yes, come along.

[*As they are going SALLIE stops. She holds out her arms to him.*]

SALLIE: Jim, good-bye.

JIM (*kissing her passionately*): Oh, my dear, my dear.

SALLIE: My poor Jim.

[*They go into the next room. HUGH walks about the room slightly re-arranging the furniture and talking as he does so.*]

HUGH: A big dining-room in an old Georgian house; it's a sitting-room too, for of course they only use the drawing-room when they give a party and that they haven't done for years—Mrs. de Lacy's mourning makes such a convenient excuse. A few worthless old portraits on the walls, some good mahogany furniture, gimcrack candlesticks on the fine Adams mantelpiece, two pictures of comic cats by Louis Wain. The light is cold and dim. (*He does something to the light switches.*) Yes, like that.

[MISS PETTIGREW (SARAH) and MRS. DE LACY (LUCY) come in, taking off their wraps, showing themselves in the dresses we saw them in at the party. They sit beside the fire.]

MISS PETTIGREW: Look, Lucy, fancy! The fire is still in.

MRS. DE LACY: So it is.

MISS PETTIGREW: Those beech logs are wonderful, they last so long. Why it's nearly three hours since we left for the Riordans. Shall I put another log on?

MRS. DE LACY: Better go to bed. There are only two logs left in the basket, you'll have to cut some more to-morrow.

MISS PETTIGREW: Yes, indeed I will.

MRS. DE LACY: I wish I could help you, but—my heart.

MISS PETTIGREW: Of course, Lucy. And I don't mind cutting logs a bit, it's warming work. I always say that about logs, they warm you while you're making them and they warm you when they're burning.

MRS. DE LACY: I wish to goodness you wouldn't be for ever looking on the bright side of things, Sarah, it's—it's most irritating.

MISS PETTIGREW: Is it, Lucy? I'm sorry but I can't help feeling gay to-night after that lovely party.

[*She starts to hum "So, we'll go no more a-roving."*]

MRS. DE LACY: Do be quiet. You were ridiculous to-night. You were as gay as—as a three-year-old.

MISS PETTIGREW: Was I, Lucy? Did I chatter too much?

MRS. DE LACY: You did!

MISS PETTIGREW: Isn't that dreadful of me? But the lights,

and all the young people, and the lovely food, and that mulled claret—they went to my head I suppose.

*[She gets up and starts to waltz, singing.]*

So, we'll go no more a-roving  
So late into the night.

MRS. DE LACY: Sit down and behave yourself.

MISS PETTIGREW (*still dancing*): No, join me, partner me. You always used to be gentleman when we practised dancing long ago together. Come on, Lucy.

MRS. DE LACY: Ridiculous. At our age.

MISS PETTIGREW (*waltzing to her*): Come on.

*[She pulls her up. Far away a ghostly piano and violin are heard playing the waltz from "The Merry Widow."]*

MISS PETTIGREW: That was the waltz they played—do you remember?—at the Hunt Ball the night Bob proposed to you.

MRS. DE LACY: I remember.

MISS PETTIGREW: Mr. Clarke-Barry's band, wasn't it? We had met Mr. de Lacy at the Dublin Exhibition. That was nineteen hundred and seven, wasn't it, Lucy?

MRS. DE LACY: Yes. The Morgans introduced us.

MISS PETTIGREW: How happy you were that evening after the ball. You came into my room; we brushed each other's hair, and you told me about Bob.

MRS. DE LACY: I remember.

MISS PETTIGREW: We were both so happy. Bob was so handsome.

MRS. DE LACY: But no good as a husband. You were luckier, Sarah, after all.

MISS PETTIGREW: Because I never loved anyone? Or at least no one ever loved me. Was I, Lucy?

MRS. DE LACY: Of course you were.

MISS PETTIGREW: I don't know. When I saw those young people to-night—Jack and Mollie and Mr. Daly and Miss Long—I felt I could almost cry.



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MRS. DE LACY: Nonsense. Jack and Mollie are the most ordinary people. Bob and I—I admit that Bob was hopeless as a business man and as a husband—but we were never ordinary.

MISS PETTIGREW: Maybe Mollie doesn't think Jack ordinary.

MRS. DE LACY: Rubbish. I won't dance any more. It's ridiculous, at our age.

*[They stop dancing.]*

MISS PETTIGREW: I danced three times to-night, with Mr. Riordan and Mr. Daly and Jack.

MRS. DE LACY: I saw you. Disgraceful.

MISS PETTIGREW: Was it? I'm sorry. But it was all so lovely. If only Hugh hadn't behaved so queerly. What was the matter with him, do you think?

MRS. DE LACY: Oh, just nerves and foolishness, I suppose. I'm sure he leads a most dissipated life in London; I'm told all young men there do.

MISS PETTIGREW: Kate always says he's the steadiest of boys.

MRS. DE LACY: Hm! . . . Read the papers. Murders. Suicides. Night-clubs. . . . By the way, what was he saying about your bag?

MISS PETTIGREW: My bag? Oh nothing. Just nonsense.

MRS. DE LACY: It sounded nonsense to me but you got so flustered I thought for a minute there must be something in it.

MISS PETTIGREW: In it? In the bag?

MRS. DE LACY: In what he was saying.

MISS PETTIGREW: Well—in a way—there was.

MRS. DE LACY: There was? What do you mean?

MISS PETTIGREW: You'll be cross with me, Lucy, I know, but I couldn't resist it, and no one saw me, I'll swear to that, and Hugh wasn't in the room at the time so I don't know how he suspected, and anyhow I didn't let him open my bag, and we haven't tasted butter for a week—

MRS. DE LACY: What on earth are you talking about?

MISS PETTIGREW: Those little rolls with the sausages inside them—weren't they lovely?

MRS. DE LACY: They were very nice. I only had one; I'd have liked another but the plate never came round again.

MISS PETTIGREW: It came round to me. And I thought—a couple of them for our breakfast——

MRS. DE LACY: Sarah!

MISS PETTIGREW: Yes. I slipped them into my bag, two of them.

MRS. DE LACY: You stole them?

MISS PETTIGREW: It wasn't exactly stealing, Lucy. Kate Riordan would strip her table for us and well you know it. But I couldn't ask her for food.

MRS. DE LACY: I should think not.

MISS PETTIGREW (*taking the rolls out of her bag*): Look, there they are. They smell so nice. . . . You're furious with me, Lucy?

MRS. DE LACY (*after a pause*): I should be, but I'm not. My God, that shows how low we've sunk.

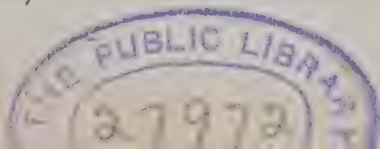
MISS PETTIGREW: Things will be better in a little while when the hens begin to lay again.

MRS. DE LACY: To be depending on half a dozen hens! The Pettigrews to be waiting on six white Wyandottes. Thank God Papa never lived to see this day.

MISS PETTIGREW: They're very red in the comb, they'll be laying any day now. And we're never cold, Lucy, with all the old trees on the place. And I don't mind cutting up the logs, not a bit. There's others worse off than we are. (*Timidly*) Would you eat the roll now?

MRS. DE LACY: It would choke me.

MISS PETTIGREW: Indeed I don't feel hungry either. I'll heat them for the breakfast. That mulled claret—it warmed the cockles of the heart, didn't it, Lucy? I thought Mr. Riordan took a little too much whisky before the evening was over. Did you think so, Lucy? Indeed one shouldn't



say a word against him, he's such a kind man and has been the best of friends to us.

MRS. DE LACY: That reminds me—he gave me a letter when we were leaving.

MISS PETTIGREW: What was in it?

MRS. DE LACY: I hadn't a chance to read it.

MISS PETTIGREW: Maybe the shares are paying again.

MRS. DE LACY: Maybe they are. He said it might be years before we'd get a dividend, but that in the long run they were as safe as could be.

*[She takes a letter from her bag.]*

MISS PETTIGREW: Hurry and see what he says.

MRS. DE LACY (*opening the letter*): The light's dim. (*Reading*) "Dear Mrs. de Lacy—As an old friend of yours and of your sister's . . . not offended . . . sake of old times . . . well, well." . . .

MISS PETTIGREW: What is it?

MRS. DE LACY: He's sent a cheque, he's offering us money.

MISS PETTIGREW: Money?

MRS. DE LACY: Twenty pounds, to tide us over the winter, he says.

MISS PETTIGREW: Twenty pounds! Oh, isn't he the generous man?

MRS. DE LACY: Indeed he is.

MISS PETTIGREW: We could get a few clothes, and maybe a little goat, and we'd have milk for our tea and meal for the hens and—and——

MRS. DE LACY: We'd have nothing of the sort.

MISS PETTIGREW: Why not? What would you spend it on?

MRS. DE LACY: Good friend as Joseph Riordan is I'd die sooner than take anything from him. He's done his best for us, he's looked after our stocks and shares and 'tisn't his fault that all has gone wrong with us. If I took this money from him I could never walk into his house again and hold my head up.

MISS PETTIGREW: But you weren't cross with me for taking the rolls.

MRS. DE LACY: I should have been. Never must you do such a thing again. Promise me, Sarah.

MISS PETTIGREW (*starting to cry*): I can't promise. I can't trust myself not to. You're strong, Lucy, I'm weak, I'm hungry. I want nice clothes, I want nice food. Don't I know that I look a fright going around in old Aunt Julia's clothes of thirty years ago. I make a joke about it and say I'm all in the fashion, but of course I'm not. I'm—I'm comic.

MRS. DE LACY: You're not. You're a lady whatever clothes you wear.

MISS PETTIGREW: I'm tired of being a lady, tired of this poverty, tired of trying to keep up an appearance and knowing that everyone sees through it, and that the men lounging outside the public-houses and seeing me pass talk of me as "poor ould Miss Pettigrew."

MRS. DE LACY: They don't. How do you know they do?

MISS PETTIGREW: I don't know for certain, but I just know.

MRS. DE LACY: If we're poor it's through no fault of our own.

MISS PETTIGREW: That makes no difference. Maybe they'd think more of us if we had lost it card-playing or horse-racing. Not that I care what they think. But, twenty pounds! Oh, however will you thank Joseph Riordan?

MRS. DE LACY: I'll write to him very nicely and tell him we're in no need.

MISS PETTIGREW: You'll send back the cheque?

MRS. DE LACY: Of course.

MISS PETTIGREW: You'll tell him we're in no need? That'll be a lie he won't easily believe.

MRS. DE LACY: He's gentleman enough to take it as it's meant to be taken, as a polite refusal of his help. After all, it isn't his fault that our shares have come to nothing.

MISS PETTIGREW: No. . . . But to send back all that money. . . . Lucy!



MRS. DE LACY: I won't send it back. I'll burn the cheque—now.

MISS PETTIGREW: No, no, please, Lucy, wait till the morning.

MRS. DE LACY: There's enough fire left to burn it.

MISS PETTIGREW: Wait till the morning. Maybe you'll think different in the morning.

MRS. DE LACY: That's what I'm afraid of, Sarah, I might think different in the morning. Isn't it queer the difference good food and a drop of wine make? I'm feeling very high and moral now, I mightn't feel so moral in the morning.

*[She burns the cheque.]*

MISS PETTIGREW (*in a little voice*): I'll burn the rolls if you like, Lucy.

MRS. DE LACY: No, no, child, keep them. Have the two of them for your breakfast.

MISS PETTIGREW: I couldn't eat them; they'd stick in my throat.

MRS. DE LACY: They'll do nothing of the sort. I'll share with you if that will help you. Maybe it will do my pride good to eat stolen food. (*MISS PETTIGREW begins to cry.*) There, there, I didn't mean to start you crying. . . . I declare I believe I'm crying myself.

*[She puts her arms round her sister and the scene fades.]*

HUGH (*moving about in the darkness as if he were arranging furniture, which he probably isn't*): A white bed here, an image of the Blessed Virgin, a little lamp, and Honor in her nightdress kneeling before it; she has said her prayers, she is going to bed.

*[A light comes up and we see HONOR kneeling in her white nightdress.]*

HONOR: I thought I had utterly forgotten; I thought I had torn him entirely out of my heart. But I was deceiving myself and I was trying to deceive you, Holy Mother. This flower, this daisy he gave me long ago, I have kept it. Now I tear it to pieces. See! It's all gone, it's all forgotten. I'm empty now, empty of every human affection.



[*She takes her Thomas à Kempis from the bed and reads.*

"Lord, how oft shall I resign myself and wherein shall I forsake myself? . . . I have said to thee full oft and yet I say again; forsake thyself, resign of thyself and thou shalt enjoy great peace. To this enforce thyself, this pray thou, this desire thou, that thou may be despoiled of all manner of self, and thou, bare, follow Jesus only and die to thyself and live everlastingly in me. Then shall end all vain fantasies, wicked conturbations and superfluous cares; then also shall go away inordinate dread and inordinate love shall die."

[*The scene darkens and closes.*

HUGH: And now, as slap contrast, we move from a girl's bedroom in Ireland to a back-sitting-room in London, probably in one of those awful terraces near Paddington Station. It's late afternoon and there's a touch of fog outside and it's neither cold nor hot. There's a ghastly red wall-paper on the walls and imitation eighteenth-century prints—for we'd like to pretend we're Harley Street, but of course we're miles too far west. And a maid with a dirty apron has shown us in and here we are, poor old Aunt Moll and Sallie Long.

[*And there they are, in mackintoshes and hats, sitting opposite each other at the centre table.*

AUNT MOLL: I don't like this place.

SALLIE: It's all right.

AUNT MOLL: What is he like, this doctor of yours?

SALLIE: All right.

AUNT MOLL: I don't believe you.

SALLIE: Well, of course, he couldn't be quite all right to be what he is and to do what he's prepared to do.

AUNT MOLL: Hm. (*SALLIE shivers and catches her breath in a sob.*) Sallie, come away, come out of this place, it's evil.

SALLIE: No. I'm going through with it.

AUNT MOLL: Have courage. Think of Bernard Shaw.

SALLIE: It's pretty easy for him. He never had to bear an

illegitimate baby; he need only talk light-heartedly about them.

AUNT MOLL: Child, I'll do anything I can to help you.

SALLIE: Dear Aunt Moll, you've done so much coming with me to London like this—don't leave me now. Call me a little coward if you like. I am, but I couldn't face mother; she's fond of me, she'd forgive me like a shot, but she'd be so sorry, so terribly sorry: and father—he wouldn't be cross, but he'd be so hurt and sorry. Oh, I couldn't bear people being sorry for me!

AUNT MOLL: I know. But don't let them be sorry. Be proud, be gay.

SALLIE: You're talking out of your reading, Aunt Moll, not out of common sense. There's nothing proud or gay in having an unwanted fatherless baby. And I'm not going to do it, I'm not going to do it. (*Getting more and more hysterical*) Go on, walk out of here, don't get yourself mixed up in anything dirty and questionable. I thought you were my friend, the only real friend I had in Knock, but you're as conventional as the rest. Go back by the train to-night, eight forty-five from Euston, isn't it? Tell in Knock to-morrow afternoon where you saw me last, in a questionable doctor's waiting-room near Paddington. Tell them all I was going to do, have done to me, tell Jim's parents——

AUNT MOLL: You're talking nonsense. Pull yourself together. You know I'm your friend.

SALLIE: I'm sorry, Aunt Moll, I'm sorry.

[DOCTOR SMITH *comes in, a greasy, plausible man.*

DOCTOR SMITH (*to SALLIE*): Good afternoon, Mrs. Smith.

SALLIE: Good afternoon, Doctor Smith. This is my aunt, Miss—Miss——

AUNT MOLL: Smith.

DOCTOR SMITH: Good afternoon, Miss Smith. We talked the matter over very fully the last time you were here, Mrs. Smith.

SALLIE: Yes, we did. I have the money here.

[*She opens her bag.*

DOCTOR SMITH: In notes?

SALLIE: In notes.

*[She counts them out.]*

DOCTOR SMITH: I'll ring for Nurse Smith.

*[He does so.]*

AUNT MOLL: Is everyone here called Smith?

DOCTOR SMITH: It is a convenient name, Miss—er—Smith.  
*(Taking the notes)* Thank you.

SALLIE: You haven't counted them.

DOCTOR SMITH: I am sure that will not be necessary. I know a lady when I meet one.

AUNT MOLL: How long will it—I mean, how long, I mean——

DOCTOR SMITH: Oh, a short time, a very short time.

AUNT MOLL: I mean, how soon will my niece be out and about?

DOCTOR SMITH: Oh, a short time, a very short time. Ah, here is Nurse Smith.

*[NURSE SMITH, not too smart a nurse, appears.]*

DOCTOR SMITH: Miss Smith, will you take Mrs. Smith downstairs. I shall follow you in a few minutes.

*[NURSE SMITH makes SALLIE get up and come with her. As she passes to go out AUNT MOLL goes to her.]*

AUNT MOLL: My darling child.

SALLIE: If anything happens, tell Jim that—no, better tell him nothing.

*[She goes out.]*

DOCTOR SMITH: Nothing bad can possibly happen, Miss Smith. As I said, in a short time, a very short time——

*[The scene suddenly goes black. The platform at the back on which the bench was is illuminated as a surpliced clergyman appears.]*

CLERGYMAN: I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord, and whoso liveth and believeth in Me shall never

die. For the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed. . . . For as much as it hath pleased Almighty God to take unto himself the soul of our dear sister here departed, we therefore commit her body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

*[His voice fades away and scene darkens. A light comes up. JIM DALY is sitting by the fire writing on a pad on his knee.]*

JIM DALY: Darling Mums—I have got my final with flying colours and apparently a medal thrown in, gold they tell me, but I expect brass or maybe leather. Anyhow I've made up my mind to take a special course, so I won't be able to get home before the summer. Any news of Sallie? She hasn't answered my last two letters. The weather here is pretty good. I'm going to a Rugger dance at the Metro-pole to-night and on Thursday I'm going——

*[The scene fades. We see HUGH and AUNT MOLL; she is without mackintosh and hat, she seems to be crying.]*

HUGH: What is the matter, Aunt Moll?

AUNT MOLL: I'm foolish, I suppose, but it seemed so real.

HUGH: Nonsense. It's all in my mind. A figment of the imagination, as they say.

AUNT MOLL: Is it? Are you sure?

HUGH: Certain. I'm not a story-teller for nothing. Ssh! I hear them getting up inside; they'll be in in a minute. I'll prove to you it's all fancy. I'll ask Miss Pettigrew to show me what's in her bag, she'll let me search it; there'll be no sausage-rolls there and that will prove to you how imaginary the whole thing is.

AUNT MOLL: Please God.

*[The door from the dining-room opens; everyone comes in as they went in at the beginning of the play.]*

JIM: Whew! I've eaten too much, Mrs. Riordan.

JACK: Same here. You certainly gave us a meal to-night, Mother.

MISS PETTIGREW: Quite a collation, Mrs. Riordan. Wasn't it, Lucy?

MRS. DE LACY: Sumptuous.

MRS. RIORDAN: Well, indeed, I'm glad you liked it, but I think you hardly took a pick.

SALLIE: Indeed no.

MR. RIORDAN: I think we've all done remarkably well, Mother, except Hugh. And you were the belle of the ball, Hugh, and you only looked in for a minute to get a glass of milk for Aunt Moll.

HUGH: Oh, I stole a glass of claret for myself, Daddy.

MR. RIORDAN: Claret? Sure that's no drink for a man.

MISS PETTIGREW (*cooly*): We missed you, Mr. Hugh.

HUGH: I'm sorry. I was talking to Aunt Moll.

MRS. RIORDAN: Oh, did you get your milk, Aunt Moll? I forgot about it.

AUNT MOLL: Oh yes, Aunt Moll got her milk. She took care she got her milk; she saw to it herself.

HUGH: You mean I got it for you.

MR. RIORDAN: I think we might have a game or a song or something. How soon will the table be cleared, Kate? Can't we play ping-pong?

MRS. RIORDAN: You must give Maggie ten minutes.

JIM: After that supper? Have a heart, Mr. Riordan.

MRS. RIORDAN: I thought later on we might clear the floor and have a bit of a dance.

JIM: Fine.

MOLLIE: I'm not allowed to dance.

MRS. RIORDAN: Of course not, dear.

MR. RIORDAN: Then let's have a song. I'm in the humour for a bit of music. After all, I nearly won the Captain's prize.

MRS. RIORDAN: Yes, I think a little music would be nice. Would you like some music, Mrs. de Lacy?

MRS. DE LACY: As long as it's not jazz.



MISS PETTIGREW: Oh, I love jazz. Of course I can't dance it.

*[She laughs sillily.]*

MRS. RIORDAN: Honor, will you——?

HONOR: A terrible cold. Really, truly, Mrs. Riordan, not just an excuse.

MRS. RIORDAN: Isn't that too bad. Miss Long?

SALLIE LONG: I only sing when Mother wants the room cleared.

JIM: Oh, nonsense, Sallie.

SALLIE: No, quite imposs. (*Turning to JACK*) But, Mr. Jack?

JACK: Nothing doing.

MISS PETTIGREW: But you sing most beautifully.

JACK: Never had a lesson in my life.

MISS PETTIGREW: Like the nightingales—not that I've ever heard one; there are none in Ireland I believe, quite extraordinary.

JIM: Come on, Jack. Give us a rouser.

MR. RIORDAN: Yes, start it rolling, Jack, something lively. Hugh, put a freshener in that, will you?

*[He hands him his glass. HUGH goes into the dining-room with it.]*

MRS. RIORDAN: Yes, do, dear. Mollie will play your accompaniment, won't she?

JACK: I should rather think she will. That's the reason why I married her.

MOLLIE: The only reason?

JACK: No, not the only reason. Come on, let's get it over.

AUNT MOLL: The song I asked you for, Jack.

JACK: "So, we'll go no more a-roving"? All right.

MISS PETTIGREW: Now I think this is going to be delightful. We hear so little music in Knock nowadays. I remember long ago what a lot of music there used to be at little parties

like this. Do you remember, Lucy, how you and I used to sing that duet "Oh, that we two were maying"? And you were magnificent, Lucy, in "When sparrows build."

MRS. DE LACY: Hush.

MISS PETTIGREW: These gramophones and wireless have killed all real music, that's what I always say. Give me the good amateur every time, every time, every——

HONOR: A cushion behind you, Miss Pettigrew?

MISS PETTIGREW: Thank you, dear. Ah, they're beginning. How well Mollie plays.

MRS. DE LACY: Ssh!

MISS PETTIGREW: All right, my dear. I hope I know good music when I hear it.

[MOLLIE *plays quite well*. JACK *sings well in an untrained voice*.

JACK (*singing*):

So, we'll go no more a-roving  
So late into the night,  
Though the heart be still as loving,  
And the moon be still as bright.

For the sword outwears its sheath,  
And the soul wears out the breast,  
And the heart must pause to breathe,  
And even love have rest.

Though the night was made for loving,  
And the day returns too soon,  
Yet we'll go no more a-roving  
By the light of the moon.

[*The song captures the room. MR. and MRS. RIORDAN sit back vaguely pleased. MR. RIORDAN's whiskey has been brought to him somewhere in the song by HUGH, who remains in the background. MISS PETTIGREW and her sister become sentimental but not comically so. JIM is very quiet. HONOR is holding herself in stonily. SALLIE is on the verge of a break-down. No one could guess what AUNT MOLL thinks, she is very quiet. HUGH watches it all, takes it all in in growing excitement. The song stops, there is an instant of silence.*

MRS. RIORDAN: Thank you, dear. How well you play, Mollie.

*[A little conventional murmur of thanks runs round the room.*

*SALLIE gets up and crosses to the fire, swaying a little on her feet.*

SALLIE: I can't—Jim——

HONOR *(at her side at once)*: My dear, you're a little faint, aren't you? May we go into the hall, just for a minute, Mrs. Riordan?

MRS. RIORDAN: Of course. But——

*[Almost before she can answer HONOR has got SALLIE out of the room.*

MR. RIORDAN: What's happened? Is she ill?

AUNT MOLL: Not at all, Joseph. Don't be ridiculous.

MRS. RIORDAN: Just a touch of faintness.

MOLLIE: It is hot in here.

MISS PETTIGREW: Such a good supper.

HUGH *(who has got JIM aside; he talks to him with intensity, but in a low voice so that the others don't hear him)*: She is ill and you know why. You know. Why don't you go to her? Why don't you?

JIM: I? I?——

HUGH *(almost shaking him)*: Yes, you. You!

MISS PETTIGREW: It's such a pleasant party, Mrs. Riordan, one of the nicest I've been to this winter, but of course Mr. Hugh's being here makes all the difference.

HUGH *(turning from JIM, and now he affects a gaiety)*: Yes, and now I'm going to have a joke on you all, at least I'm going to try a mild little joke on you, Miss Pettigrew. I want to search your bag.

MISS PETTIGREW: My bag?

HUGH: Yes. What have you got in your bag?

MISS PETTIGREW *(with a nervous, affected laugh)*: Do you think I've taken some of your mother's silver forks?

HUGH: Of course not. But may I search it?

MISS PETTIGREW: Certainly not.

MRS. RIORDAN: What a crazy notion.

MR. RIORDAN: What's the idea, Hugh? Is it a game?

HUGH (*holding himself in, trying to speak lightly*): No, not exactly a game, Daddy, but all the future, all truth, all reality depends on the answer to my question. Aunt Moll, *you know what I mean?*

AUNT MOLL: I do.

[HONOR and SALLIE come in.]

HONOR: We're feeling quite all right, Mrs. Riordan. It was just your very good supper and your very hot fire.

MRS. RIORDAN: I think it's high time for a nice round game or some more music. Would you like that, Mrs. de Lacy?

MRS. DE LACY: Yes, indeed. Anything you choose.

HUGH (*wildly*): No, no. There are more important things going on in this room than a little music or a good round game. Miss Pettigrew, what's in your bag?

MRS. RIORDAN: Hugh, dear——

AUNT MOLL: As Mr. Shaw says, "Press your question, press your question."

HUGH: I won't, I can't, I couldn't bear to find it was true. Oh, have it your own way.

[*He goes out quickly.*]

MRS. RIORDAN: I'm sorry, he's so overtired. No sleep coming over and he has to go back to-morrow.

MISS PETTIGREW: To-morrow? So soon?

MRS. RIORDAN: Yes, some new play coming on, I think. Jack dear, turn on the wireless, there's sure to be a dance-band somewhere, and let's have a game of Slippery Sam. You might as well bring in the claret-cup and the sandwiches from the sideboard—and the decanter and siphon. Aunt Moll, are you going to play? (*But AUNT MOLL can't answer, she has her head in her hands.*) What's the matter? Aren't you well?

AUNT MOLL (*getting up and going to the door*): I'm a stupid old woman. Let me be, Kate. I'm going to Hugh.

*[She goes out.]*

MR. RIORDAN: Poor old Aunt Moll, she's beginning to break up. Give me the cards, Kate. I'll deal.

*[They pull their chairs round the table, talking and laughing, but before the game starts the curtain has fallen.]*

THE END



William Butler Yeats

THE WORDS UPON THE  
WINDOW-PANE

*A Play*

IN MEMORY OF  
LADY GREGORY  
IN WHOSE HOUSE IT WAS WRITTEN

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

DR. TRENCH

MISS MACKENNA

JOHN CORBET

CORNELIUS PATTERSON

ABRAHAM JOHNSON

MRS. MALLET

MRS. HENDERSON

SCENE: *A lodging-house room, an armchair, a little table in front of it, chairs on either side. A fireplace and window. A kettle on the hob and some tea-things on a dresser. A door to back and towards the right. Through the door one can see an entrance hall. The sound of a knocker. MISS MACKENNA passes through and then she re-enters hall together with JOHN CORBET, a man of twenty-two or twenty-three, and DR. TRENCH, a man of between sixty and seventy.*

DR. TRENCH (*in hall*): May I introduce John Corbet, one of the Corbets of Ballymoney, but at present a Cambridge student? This is Miss Mackenna, our enthusiastic secretary.

[*They come into room, take off their coats.*]

MISS MACKENNA: I thought it better to let you in myself. This country is still sufficiently medieval to make spiritualism an undesirable theme for gossip. Give me your coats and hats, I will put them in my own room. It is just across the hall. Better sit down, your watches must be fast. Mrs. Henderson is lying down, as she always does before a séance. We won't begin for ten minutes yet.

[*She goes out with the hats and coats.*]

DR. TRENCH: Miss Mackenna does all the real work of the Dublin Spiritualists' Association. She did all the correspondence with Mrs. Henderson, and persuaded the landlady to let her this big room and a small room upstairs. We are a poor society and could not guarantee anything in advance. Mrs. Henderson has come from London at her own risk. She was born in Dublin and wants to spread the movement here. She lives very economically and does not expect a great deal. We all give what we can. A poor woman with the soul of an apostle.

JOHN CORBET: Have there been many séances?

DR. TRENCH: Only three so far.

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JOHN CORBET: I hope she will not mind my scepticism. I have looked into Myers' *Human Personality* and a wild book by Conan Doyle, but am unconvinced.

DR. TRENCH: We all have to find the truth for ourselves. Lord Dunraven, then Lord Adare, introduced my father to the famous David Home. My father often told me that he saw David Home floating in the air in broad daylight, but I did not believe a word of it. I had to investigate for myself, and I was very hard to convince. Mrs. Piper, an American trance medium, not unlike Mrs. Henderson, convinced me.

JOHN CORBET: A state of somnambulism and voices coming through her lips that purport to be those of dead persons?

DR. TRENCH: Exactly: quite the best kind of mediumship if you want to establish the identity of a spirit. But do not expect too much. There has been a hostile influence.

JOHN CORBET: You mean an evil spirit?

DR. TRENCH: The poet Blake said that he never knew a bad man that had not something very good about him. I say a hostile influence, an influence that disturbed the last séance very seriously. I cannot tell you what happened, for I have not been at any of Mrs. Henderson's séances. Trance mediumship has nothing new to show me—I told the young people when they made me their President that I would probably stay at home, that I could get more out of Emanuel Swedenborg than out of any séance. (*A knock.*) That is probably old Cornelius Patterson; he thinks they race horses and whippets in the other world, and is, so they tell me, so anxious to find out if he is right that he is always punctual. Miss Mackenna will keep him to herself for some minutes. He gives her tips for Harold's Cross.

[MISS MACKENNA crosses to hall door and admits CORNELIUS PATTERSON. She brings him to her room across the hall.]

JOHN CORBET (*who has been wandering about*): This is a wonderful room for a lodging-house.

DR. TRENCH: It was a private house until about fifty years ago. It was not so near the town in those days,

and there are large stables at the back. Quite a number of notable people lived here. Grattan was born upstairs—no, not Grattan, Curran perhaps—I forget—but I do know that this house in the early part of the eighteenth century belonged to friends of Jonathan Swift, or rather of Stella. Swift chaffed her in the *Journal to Stella* because of certain small sums of money she lost at cards probably in this very room. That was before Vanessa appeared upon the scene. It was a country house in those days, surrounded by trees and gardens. Somebody cut some lines from a poem of hers upon the window-pane—tradition says Stella herself.

[*A knock.*

Here they are, but you will hardly make them out in this light.

[*They stand in the window. CORBET stoops down to see better. MISS MACKENNA and ABRAHAM JOHNSON enter and stand near door.*

ABRAHAM JOHNSON: Where is Mrs. Henderson?

MISS MACKENNA: She is upstairs; she always rests before a séance.

ABRAHAM JOHNSON: I must see her before the séance. I know exactly what to do to get rid of this evil influence.

MISS MACKENNA: If you go up to see her there will be no séance at all. She says it is dangerous even to think, much less to speak of, an evil influence.

ABRAHAM JOHNSON: Then I shall speak to the President.

MISS MACKENNA: Better talk the whole thing over first in my room. Mrs. Henderson says that there must be perfect harmony.

ABRAHAM JOHNSON: Something must be done. The last séance was completely spoiled.

[*A knock.*

MISS MACKENNA: That may be Mrs. Mallet; she is a very experienced spiritualist. Come to my room, old Patterson and some others are there already.



*[She brings him to the other room and later crosses to hall door to admit MRS. MALLET.]*

JOHN CORBET: I know those lines well—they are part of a poem Stella wrote for Swift's fifty-fourth birthday. Only three poems of hers and some lines she added to a poem of Swift's have come down to us, but they are enough to prove her a better poet than Swift. Even those few words on the window make me think of a seventeenth-century poet, Donne or Crashaw. (*He quotes*):

“You taught how I might youth prolong  
By knowing what is right and wrong,  
How from my heart to bring supplies  
Of lustre to my fading eyes.”

How strange that a celibate scholar, well on in life, should keep the love of two such women! He met Vanessa in London at the height of his political power. She followed him to Dublin. She loved him for nine years, perhaps died of love, but Stella loved him all her life.

DR. TRENCH: I have shown that writing to several persons and you are the first who has recognized the lines.

JOHN CORBET: I am writing an essay on Swift and Stella for my doctorate at Cambridge. I hope to prove that in Swift's day men of intellect reached the height of their power—the greatest position they ever attained in society and the State, that everything great in Ireland and in our character, in what remains of our architecture, comes from that day; that we have kept its seal longer than England.

DR. TRENCH: A tragic life: Bolingbroke, Harley, Ormonde, all those great Ministers that were his friends, banished and broken.

JOHN CORBET: I do not think you can explain him in that way—his tragedy had deeper foundations, his ideal order was the Roman Senate, his ideal men Brutus and Cato. Such an order and such men had seemed possible once more, but the movement passed and he foresaw the ruin to come, Democracy, Rousseau, the French Revolution; that is why he hated the common run of men—“I hate lawyers, I hate doctors,” he said, “though I love

Dr. So-and-So and Judge So-and-so"—that is why he wrote *Gulliver*, that is why he wore out his brain, that is why he felt *saeva indignatio*, that is why he sleeps under the greatest epitaph in history. You remember how it goes? It is almost finer in English than in Latin: "He has gone where fierce indignation can lacerate his heart no more."

[ABRAHAM JOHNSON *comes in*, followed by MRS. MALLET and CORNELIUS PATTERSON.

ABRAHAM JOHNSON: Something must be done, Dr. Trench, to drive away the influence that has destroyed our séances. I have come here week after week at considerable expense. I am from Belfast. I am by profession a minister of the Gospel, I do a great deal of work among the poor and ignorant. I produce considerable effect by singing and preaching, but I know that my effect should be much greater than it is. My hope is that I shall be able to communicate with the great Evangelist Sankey. I want to ask him to stand invisible beside me when I speak or sing, and lay his hands upon my head and give me such a portion of his power that my work may be blessed as the work of Moody and Sankey was blessed.

MRS. MALLET: What Mr. Johnson says about the hostile influence is quite true. The last two séances were completely spoilt. I am thinking of starting a tea-shop in Folkestone. I followed Mrs. Henderson to Dublin to get my husband's advice, but two spirits kept talking and would not let any other spirit say a word.

DR. TRENCH: Did the spirits say the same thing and go through the same drama at both séances?

MRS. MALLET: Yes—just as if they were characters in some kind of horrible play.

DR. TRENCH: That is what I was afraid of.

MRS. MALLET: My husband was drowned at sea ten years ago, but constantly speaks to me through Mrs. Henderson as if he were still alive. He advises me about everything I do, and I am utterly lost if I cannot question him.

CORNELIUS PATTERSON: I never did like the Heaven they talk about in churches: but when somebody told me that Mrs. Mallet's husband ate and drank and went about with his favourite dog, I said to myself, "That is the place for Corney Patterson." I came here to find out if it was true, and I declare to God I have not heard one word about it.

ABRAHAM JOHNSON: I ask you, Dr. Trench, as President of the Dublin Spiritualists' Association, to permit me to read the ritual of exorcism appointed for such occasions. After the last séance I copied it out of an old book in the library of Belfast University. I have it here.

*[He takes paper out of his pocket.]*

DR. TRENCH: The spirits are people like ourselves, we treat them as our guests and protect them from discourtesy and violence, and every exorcism is a curse or a threatened curse. We do not admit that there are evil spirits. Some spirits are earth-bound—they think they are still living and go over and over some action of their past lives, just as we go over and over some painful thought, except that where they are thought is reality. For instance, when a spirit which has died a violent death comes to a medium for the first time, it re-lives all the pains of death.

MRS. MALLET: When my husband came for the first time the medium gasped and struggled as if she was drowning. It was terrible to watch.

DR. TRENCH: Sometimes a spirit re-lives not the pain of death but some passionate or tragic moment of life. Swedenborg describes this and gives the reason for it. There is an incident of the kind in the *Odyssey*, and many in Eastern literature; the murderer repeats his murder, the robber his robbery, the lover his serenade, the soldier hears the trumpet once again. If I were a Catholic I would say that such spirits were in Purgatory. In vain do we write *requiescat in pace* upon the tomb, for they must suffer, and we in our turn must suffer until God gives peace. Such spirits do not often come to séances unless those séances are held in houses where those spirits lived, or where the event took place. This spirit which speaks those incomprehensible words and does not answer when spoken to is of such a

nature. The more patient we are, the more quickly will it pass out of its passion and its remorse.

ABRAHAM JOHNSON: I am still convinced that the spirit which disturbed the last séance is evil. If I may not exorcise it I will certainly pray for protection.

DR. TRENCH: Mrs. Henderson's control, Lulu, is able and experienced and can protect both medium and sitters, but it may help Lulu if you pray that the spirit find rest.

[ABRAHAM JOHNSON *sits down and prays silently, moving his lips.* MRS. HENDERSON *comes in with* MISS MACKENNA *and others.* MISS MACKENNA *shuts the door.*

DR. TRENCH: Mrs. Henderson, may I introduce to you Mr. Corbet, a young man from Cambridge and a sceptic, who hopes that you will be able to convince him.

MRS. HENDERSON: We are all sceptics once. He must not expect too much from a first séance. He must persevere.

[*She sits in the armchair and the others begin to seat themselves.*

MISS MACKENNA *goes to* JOHN CORBET *and they remain standing.*

MISS MACKENNA: I am glad that you are a sceptic.

JOHN CORBET: I thought you were a spiritualist.

MISS MACKENNA: I have seen a good many séances, and sometimes think it is all coincidence and thought-transference. (*She says this in a low voice.*) Then at other times I think as Dr. Trench does, and then I feel like Job—you know the quotation—the hair of my head stands up. A spirit passes before my face.

MRS. MALLET: Turn the key, Dr. Trench, we don't want anybody blundering in here. (DR. TRENCH *locks door.*) Come and sit here, Miss Mackenna.

MISS MACKENNA: No, I am going to sit beside Mr. Corbet.

[CORBET and MISS MACKENNA *sit down.*

JOHN CORBET: You feel like Job to-night?

MISS MACKENNA: I feel that something is going to happen, that is why I am glad that you are a sceptic.

JOHN CORBET: You feel safer?



MISS MACKENNA: Yes, safer.

MRS. HENDERSON: I am glad to meet all my dear friends again and to welcome Mr. Corbet amongst us. As he is a stranger I must explain that we do not call up spirits, we make the right conditions and they come. I do not know who is going to come; sometimes there are a great many and the guides choose between them. The guides try to send somebody for everybody but do not always succeed. If you want to speak to some dear friend who has passed over, do not be discouraged. If your friend cannot come this time, maybe he can next time. My control is a dear little girl called Lulu who died when she was five or six years old. She describes the spirits present and tells us what spirit wants to speak. Miss Mackenna, a verse of a hymn, please, the same we had last time, and will everyone join in the singing.

[*They sing the following lines from Hymn 564, Dublin Church Hymnal.*

“Sun of my soul, Thou Saviour dear,  
It is not night if Thou be near:  
O may no earth-born cloud arise  
To hide Thee from Thy servant's eyes.”

[MRS. HENDERSON *is leaning back in her chair asleep.*

MISS MACKENNA (to JOHN CORBET): She always snores like that when she is going off.

MRS. HENDERSON (*in a child's voice*): Lulu so glad to see all her friends.

MRS. MALLET: And we are glad you have come, Lulu.

MRS. HENDERSON (*in a child's voice*): Lulu glad to see new friend.

MISS MACKENNA (to JOHN CORBET): She is speaking to you.

JOHN CORBET: Thank you, Lulu.

MRS. HENDERSON (*in a child's voice*): You mustn't laugh at the way I talk.

JOHN CORBET: I am not laughing, Lulu.



MRS. HENDERSON (*in a child's voice*): Nobody must laugh. Lulu does her best but can't say big long words. Lulu sees a tall man here, lots of hair on face (MRS. HENDERSON *passes her hands over her cheeks and chin*) not much on the top of his head (MRS. HENDERSON *passes her hand over the top of her head*) red necktie, and such a funny sort of pin.

MRS. MALLET: Yes. . . . Yes. . . .

MRS. HENDERSON (*in a child's voice*): Pin like a horseshoe.

MRS. MALLET: It's my husband.

MRS. HENDERSON (*in a child's voice*): He has a message.

MRS. MALLET: Yes.

MRS. HENDERSON (*in a child's voice*): Lulu cannot hear. He is too far off. He has come near. Lulu can hear now. He says . . . he says, "Drive that man away!" He is pointing to somebody in the corner, that corner over there. He says it is the bad man who spoilt everything last time. If they won't drive him away, Lulu will scream.

MISS MACKENNA: That horrible spirit again.

ABRAHAM JOHNSON: Last time he monopolized the séance.

MRS. MALLET: He would not let anybody speak but himself.

MRS. HENDERSON (*in a child's voice*): They have driven that bad man away. Lulu sees a young lady.

MRS. MALLET: Is not my husband here?

MRS. HENDERSON (*in a child's voice*): Man with funny pin gone away. Young lady here—Lulu thinks she must be at a fancy dress party, such funny clothes, hair all in curls—all bent down on floor near that old man with glasses.

DR. TRENCH: No, I do not recognize her.

MRS. HENDERSON (*in a child's voice*): That bad man, that bad old man in the corner, they have let him come back. Lulu is going to scream. O. . . . O. . . . (*In a man's voice*) How dare you write to her? How dare you ask if we were married? How dare you question her?

DR. TRENCH: A soul in its agony—it cannot see us or hear us.

MRS. HENDERSON (*upright and rigid, only her lips moving, and still in a man's voice*): You sit crouching there. Did you not hear what I said? How dared you question her? I found you an ignorant little girl without intellect, without moral ambition. How many times did I not stay away from great men's houses, how many times forsake the Lord Treasurer, how many times neglect the business of the State that we might read Plutarch together?

[ABRAHAM JOHNSON *half rises*. DR. TRENCH *motions him to remained seated*.

DR. TRENCH: Silence!

ABRAHAM JOHNSON: But, Dr. Trench . . .

DR. TRENCH: Hush—we can do nothing.

MRS. HENDERSON (*speaking as before*): I taught you to think in every situation of life not as Hester Vanhomrigh would think in that situation, but as Cato or Brutus would, and now you behave like some common slut with her ear against the keyhole.

JOHN CORBET (*to MISS MACKENNA*): It is Swift, Jonathan Swift, talking to the woman he called Vanessa. She was christened Hester Vanhomrigh.

MRS. HENDERSON (*in VANESSA'S voice*): I questioned her, Jonathan, because I love. Why have you let me spend hours in your company, if you did not want me to love you? (*In Swift's voice*) When I re-built Rome in your mind it was as though I walked its streets. (*In Vanessa's voice*) Was that all, Jonathan? Was I nothing but a painter's canvas? (*In Swift's voice*) My God, do you think it was easy? I was a man of strong passions and I had sworn never to marry. (*In Vanessa's voice*) If you and she are not married, why should we not marry like other men and women? I loved you from the first moment when you came to my mother's house and began to teach me. I thought it would be enough to look at you, to speak to you, to hear you speak. I followed you to Ireland five years ago and I can bear it no longer. It is not enough to look, to speak, to hear. Jonathan, Jonathan, I am a woman, the women Brutus and Cato loved were not different. (*In Swift's voice*) I have something in my blood that no child

must inherit. I have constant attacks of dizziness; I pretend they come from a surfeit of fruit when I was a child. I had them in London . . . there was a great doctor there, Dr. Arbuthnot, I told him of those attacks of dizziness, I told him of worse things. It was he who explained. There is a line of Dryden's . . . (*In Vanessa's voice*) O, I know—"Great wits are sure to madness near allied." If you had children,<sup>2</sup> Jonathan, my blood would make them healthy. I will take your hand, I will lay it upon my heart—upon the Vanhomrigh blood that has been healthy for generations. (MRS. HENDERSON *slowly raises her left hand.*) That is the first time you have touched my body, Jonathan. (MRS. HENDERSON *stands up and remains rigid. In Swift's voice*) What do I care if it be healthy? What do I care if it could make mine healthy? Am I to add another to the healthy rascaldom and knavery of the world? (*In Vanessa's voice*) Look at me, Jonathan. Your arrogant intellect separates us. Give me both your hands. I will put them upon my breast. (MRS. HENDERSON *raises her right hand to the level of her left and then raises both to her breast.*) O, it is white—white as the gambler's dice—white ivory dice. Think of the uncertainty. Perhaps a mad child—perhaps a rascal—perhaps a knave—perhaps not, Jonathan. The dice of the intellect are loaded, but I am the common ivory dice. (*Her hands are stretched out as though drawing somebody towards her.*) It is not my hands that draw you back. My hands are weak, they could not draw you back if you did not love as I love. You said that you have strong passions; that is true, Jonathan—no man in Ireland is so passionate. That is why you need me, that is why you need children, nobody has greater need. You are growing old. An old man without children is very solitary. Even his friends, men as old as he, turn away, they turn towards the young, their children or their children's children. They cannot endure an old man like themselves. (MRS. HENDERSON *moves away from the chair, her movements gradually growing convulsive.*) You are not too old for the dice, Jonathan, but a few years if you turn away will make you an old miserable childless man. (*In Swift's voice*) O God, hear the prayer of Jonathan Swift, that afflicted man, and grant that he may leave to posterity nothing but his intellect that came to him from Heaven. (*In Vanessa's voice*) Can you face solitude with

that mind, Jonathan? (MRS. HENDERSON goes to the door, finds that it is closed.) Dice, white ivory dice. (*In Swift's voice*) My God, I am left alone with my enemy. Who locked the door, who locked me in with my enemy? (MRS. HENDERSON beats upon the door, sinks to the floor and then speaks as Lulu) Bad old man! Do not let him come back. Bad old man does not know he is dead. Lulu cannot find fathers, mothers, sons that have passed over. Power almost gone. (MRS. MALLETT leads MRS. HENDERSON, who seems very exhausted, back to her chair. She is still asleep. She speaks again as Lulu) Another verse of hymn. Everybody sing. Hymn will bring good influence.

[*They sing:*

“If some poor wandering child of Thine  
Have spurned to-day the voice divine,  
Now, Lord, the gracious work begin;  
Let him no more lie down in sin.”

[*During the hymn MRS. HENDERSON has been murmuring “Stella,” but the singing has almost drowned her voice. The singers draw one another's attention to the fact that she is speaking. The singing stops.*

DR. TRENCH: I thought she was speaking.

MRS. MALLETT: I saw her lips move.

DR. TRENCH: She would be more comfortable with a cushion, but we might wake her.

MRS. MALLETT: Nothing can wake her out of a trance like that until she wakes up herself.

[*She brings a cushion and she and DR. TRENCH put MRS. HENDERSON into a more comfortable position.*

MRS. HENDERSON (*in Swift's voice*): Stella.

MISS MACKENNA (*to JOHN CORBET*): Did you hear that? She said “Stella.”

JOHN CORBET: Vanessa has gone, Stella has taken her place.

MISS MACKENNA: Did you notice the change while we were singing? The new influence in the room?

JOHN CORBET: I thought I did, but it must have been fancy.



MRS. MALLET: Hush !

MRS. HENDERSON (*in Swift's voice*): Have I wronged you, beloved Stella ? Are you unhappy ? You have no children, you have no lover, you have no husband. A cross and ageing man for friend—nothing but that. But no, do not answer—you have answered already in that poem you wrote for my last birthday. With what scorn you speak of the common lot of women “with no adornment but a face”—

“Before the thirtieth year of life  
A maid forlorn or hated wife.”

It is the thought of the great Chrysostom who wrote in a famous passage that women loved according to the soul, loved as saints can love, keep their beauty longer, have greater happiness than women loved according to the flesh. That thought has comforted me, but it is a terrible thing to be responsible for another's happiness. There are moments when I doubt, when I think Chrysostom may have been wrong. But now I have your poem to drive doubt away. You have addressed me in these noble words:

“You taught how I might youth prolong  
By knowing what is right and wrong;  
How from my heart to bring supplies  
Of lustre to my fading eyes;  
How soon a beauteous mind repairs  
The loss of chang'd or falling hairs;  
How wit and virtue from within  
Can spread a smoothness o'er the skin.”

JOHN CORBET: The words upon the window-pane !

MRS. HENDERSON (*in Swift's voice*): Then, because you understand that I am afraid of solitude, afraid of outliving my friends—and myself—you comfort me in that last verse—you overpraise my moral nature when you attribute to it a rich mantle, but O how touching those words which describe your love:

“Late dying, may you cast a shred  
Of that rich mantle o'er my head:  
To bear with dignity my sorrow,  
One day alone, then die to-morrow.”



Yes, you will close my eyes, Stella. O, you will live long after me, dear Stella, for you are still a young woman, but you will close my eyes. (MRS. HENDERSON *sinks back in chair and speaks as Lulu.*) Bad old man gone. Power all used up. Lulu can do no more. Good-bye, friends. (MRS. HENDERSON, *speaking in her own voice*) Go away, go away ! (She wakes.) I saw him a moment ago, has he spoilt the séance again ?

MRS. MALLET: Yes, Mrs. Henderson, my husband came, but he was driven away.

DR. TRENCH: Mrs. Henderson is very tired. We must leave her to rest. (To MRS. HENDERSON) You did your best and nobody can do more than that.

*[He takes out money.]*

MRS. HENDERSON: No. . . . No. . . . I cannot take any money, not after a séance like that.

DR. TRENCH: Of course you must take it, Mrs. Henderson.

*[He puts money on table, and MRS. HENDERSON gives a furtive glance to see how much it is. She does the same as each sitter lays down his or her money.]*

MRS. MALLET: A bad séance is just as exhausting as a good séance, and you must be paid.

MRS. HENDERSON: No. . . . No. . . . Please don't. It is very wrong to take money for such a failure.

*[MRS. MALLET lays down money.]*

CORNELIUS PATTERSON: A jockey is paid whether he wins or not.

*[He lays down money.]*

MISS MACKENNA: That spirit rather thrilled me.

*[She lays down money.]*

MRS. HENDERSON: If you insist, I must take it.

ABRAHAM JOHNSON: I shall pray for you to-night. I shall ask God to bless and protect your séances.

*[He lays down money.]*

*All go out except JOHN CORBET and MRS. HENDERSON.*

JOHN CORBET: I know you are tired, Mrs. Henderson, but I must speak to you. I have been deeply moved by what I have heard. This is my contribution to prove that I am satisfied, completely satisfied.

*[He puts a note on the table.]*

MRS. HENDERSON: A pound note—nobody ever gives me more than ten shillings, and yet the séance was a failure.

JOHN CORBET (*sitting down near* MRS. HENDERSON): When I say I am satisfied I do not mean that I am convinced it was the work of spirits. I prefer to think that you created it all, that you are an accomplished actress and scholar. In my essay for my Cambridge doctorate I examine all the explanations of Swift's celibacy offered by his biographers and prove that the explanation you selected was the only plausible one. But there is something I must ask you. Swift was the chief representative of the intellect of his epoch, that arrogant intellect free at last from superstition. He foresaw its collapse. He foresaw Democracy, he must have dreaded the future. Did he refuse to beget children because of that dread? Was Swift mad? Or was it the intellect itself that was mad?

MRS. HENDERSON: Who are you talking of, sir?

JOHN CORBET: Swift, of course.

MRS. HENDERSON: Swift? I do not know anybody called Swift.

JOHN CORBET: Jonathan Swift, whose spirit seemed to be present to-night.

MRS. HENDERSON: What? That dirty old man?

JOHN CORBET: He was neither old nor dirty when Stella and Vanessa loved him.

MRS. HENDERSON: I saw him very clearly just as I woke up. His clothes were dirty, his face covered with boils. Some disease had made one of his eyes swell up, it stood out from his face like a hen's egg.

JOHN CORBET: He looked like that in his old age. Stella had been dead a long time. His brain had gone, his friends had deserted him. The man appointed to take care of him beat him to keep him quiet.

MRS. HENDERSON: Now they are old, now they are young. They change all in a moment as their thought changes. It is sometimes a terrible thing to be out of the body. God help us all.

DR. TRENCH (*at the doorway*): Come along, Corbet, Mrs. Henderson is tired out.

JOHN CORBET: Good-bye, Mrs. Henderson.

[*He goes out with DR. TRENCH. All the sitters except Miss MACKENNA, who has returned to her room, pass along the passage on their way to the front door. MRS. HENDERSON counts the money, finds her purse, which is in a vase on the mantelpiece, and puts the money in it.*]

MRS. HENDERSON: How tired I am ! I'd be the better of a cup of tea. (*She finds the teapot and puts kettle on fire, and then as she crouches down by the hearth suddenly lifts up her hands and counting her fingers, speaks in Swift's voice.*) Five great Ministers that were my friends are gone, ten great Ministers that were my friends are gone. I have not fingers enough to count the great Ministers that were my friends and that are gone. (*She wakes with a start and speaks in her own voice.*) Where did I put that tea-caddy ? Ah ! there it is. And there should be a cup and saucer. (*She finds the saucer.*) But where's the cup ? (*She moves aimlessly about the stage and then, letting the saucer fall and break, speaks in Swift's voice.*) Perish the day on which I was born !

CURTAIN

Arthur W. Bax

BACK TO ZERO

*A Play*

## CHARACTERS

BOSS BERGMAN — a trader

GOLDIE BRANDT

MANUELA

VANDEKER

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SCENE: *The interior of BOSS BERGMAN's shack at a lonely trading post on the Zambesi River. There is an atmosphere of complete desolation about the place, which is in a dilapidated condition. Even the furniture is past repair, the table resting one corner on an oil drum in place of a leg. There is a battered sofa under the window, back R., and near the curtained entrance door, back C., is an ancient gramophone on a card table. There are two other doors leading to rooms R. and L. The C. doorway is curtained with some bright-flowered material, as if a pathetic attempt has been made to make the place homely, but even this is limp and faded.*

*Sitting at a table, R. C., writing in a dog-eared exercise book, is BOSS BERGMAN. He is stocky and powerfully built, with a coarse, hairy, florid face and thick hands. He is totting up figures hesitantly, drumming the fingers of his left hand on the table as he does so. He makes an entry, and slams the book with an explosive sigh. Rises and stretches himself, and then reaches for a bottle and glass which have been standing at his elbow. Holds the bottle to the light to note the contents, uncorks it and pours out. While he is doing this, he sings unmelodiously:*

BERGMAN: Two liddle fleas went out to sea  
Upon a reel o' cotton.  
One got drowned—  
And the other got found (*drinks*)  
Upon a nigger's bottom.

Li-ti tiddle-y-i  
Tiddle-y-ity-i !

*[Wanders to the door, glass in hand, and calls:]*

Goldie ! You come on in ! Them skeeters gits vicious after sundown.

*[His voice is rather husky, and his diction a weird mixture of Cockney, seafaring terms and Americanisms.]*

*He finishes his drink, goes to an old wicker chair and sinks into it, reaching for the bottle from the table.*

*As he is pouring out his second drink, GOLDIE BRANDT comes in through the curtained doorway. She is about twenty-five. Her face*

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All applications for permission to perform this play must be made to the International One-Act Play Theatre, 60 Earlsfield Road, London, S.W.19.

*is dead white, her heavily-painted mouth marked out like a splash of blood on marble. She is combing her pale, straight hair, which droops almost to her shoulders, and smoking a cigarette.*

*Her appearance brings a vivid gleam of colour into the drab place, for she is attired in a brilliant scarlet silk wrap, which hangs open, giving a glimpse of cheap, crumpled underwear.*

*She slops across the room in heeled slippers with a gait midway between a slouch and a swagger, and sits listlessly on the sofa. The cigarette hangs from the corner of her mouth as she combs her hair mechanically. She ignores BERGMAN, who is staring at her with evident pleasure.*

BERGMAN: Pull the curtains, dearie. It's cold outside.

*[She gets up sullenly.]*

GOLDIE: Don't you ever let fresh air into this place?

*[Draws curtain.]*

BERGMAN: Don't 'ave no fresh air in these parts, dearie. It all stinks o' the swamp. Same outside as what it is in. The Zambesi ain't no 'ealth resort.

GOLDIE: No. It's jest a damn graveyard. *(Coming back)* It's no place for me, boss.

BERGMAN: 'Ave a drink, dearie.

GOLDIE: I said it's no place for me.

BERGMAN *(pouring drink)*: I 'eard yer.

GOLDIE: You don't say anything.

BERGMAN *(handing her the drink)*: Ere y'are. That'll shake you up.

GOLDIE *(turning away)*: No. That stuff don't work any more.

BERGMAN *(annoyed)*: Too bad.

*[Drinks it himself.]*

GOLDIE *(turning again)*: Listen, boss—I——

BERGMAN *(fiercely)*: Oh, stow it, cancha? You done nothin' but mope these days—driftin' about the shack like a four-penny kite sayin', "Listen, boss. Listen, boss." Well—I

ain't listenin', see ! I couldn't git you outa this place not if I 'ad a 'undred pound—and that's Gawd's truth.

GOLDIE (*flashing*): What made you think I could stick a dump like this ? Why didn't you tell me what it was like before we come out of Zanzibar ? It ain't fair, boss. You said nothin' about it being just a shack and a lot of niggers—with not another white soul in a hundred miles.

BERGMAN: You never arst me what it was like. You wasn't partikeler 'bout what sort of place you was comin' to so long as you git outa Zanzibar. If you was so scared o' swamps and niggers, you oughta told me, dearie. It's a bit too late now, ain't it ? I can't take you outa here till I gits another relief, and the Company don't send one only every three year.

GOLDIE (*aghast*): Three years ! Have I got to stop here three years ?

BERGMAN: Sure. (*Leering*) Unless you like to arst one o' the boys to show yer the road acrost the swamp. It's only ninety miles—if yer ever git to the end of it—which ain't very likely—seein' you're a pretty lady with a soft white skin.

GOLDIE: Oh, shut up ! (*Pause.*) I keep gettin' frightened, boss. When I wake up in the night I get the jitters—because everything around seems so huge and silent—and then suddenly I find out it's not silent at all. Something in the corner starts going click—click—click—like that, and I'm too scared to get out and see what it is. You can hear the mud sucking down in the swamp (*losing her nerve*) and those screams that come out of the bush—and the rain rattlin' down on the roof—and those damn niggers banging their drums——

BERGMAN (*jumping up and shouting*): Pipe down—will yer !

[*Sinks down into his chair, breathing heavily. And then, more quietly:*

You git usta that, dearie. You only bin here three months. Jest you wait another three an' you'll be like me—hardened to it. You only 'ave to wait till you git usta it—and that ain't long—take my word for it, dearie. You won't think nothin' of it when the rains come.

GOLDIE: You can't tell me that, boss. There's some things about this place you ain't quite got used to yet—and you bin here—how long—ten years?

BERGMAN (*startled*): Good Gawd Almighty, woman! Me not used to the bleedin' jungle? After ten year of tradin' with 'eadmen and cannibals—why, it's me natural born domicile, dearie—it's me 'ome—I like it. Gawd strike me dead if I don't!

GOLDIE: All right, boss, you needn't scream at me. I just kind of wondered why you keep yourself in pickle, that's all. There ain't been a day gone by when you 'aven't finished up on the floor, yelling for Manuela to come and pour water down your throat 'cos you think it's on fire.

BERGMAN (*sullenly*): There ain't nothing else to drink here but rum—that's why. I ain't goin' to start drinking up the Zambesi every time I git a thirst. I 'ate that damn river—I 'ate it—— (*Stops.*)

GOLDIE: Yes, I thought you did—your natural born domicile don't sound so good, boss. It looks to me like it's sent you crazy. (*Flaming up*) Maybe that's why you got me up here—so's you could have a bit of white flesh to look at when the black started getting monotonous! If it was—you was taking a damn mean advantage, boss.

BERGMAN: Mean advantage! (*Cruelly*) You're forgettin' somethin', ain't yer, dearie? I don't like to remind yer of sich a piffin' detail—but ain't you forgettin' that nice Italian sailor man you stuck a knife into?

GOLDIE (*clapping her hands to her ears*): Oh shut up, boss!

BERGMAN (*shouting*): Well, don't come the old soldier with me, then! You ain't done so bad, anyway. It ain't every tart on the waterfront what can knife a sailor an' git away with it! I seed yer stick 'im, didn't I?

GOLDIE: Oh, for pity's sake drop it!

BERGMAN (*ramming it home*): I knew what I was in for if someone let on I was hidin' a murderess. But I didn't think o' that. I helped you git away. I promised you a safe, comfortable place where no white man'd ever find yer—and I kept me



promise. I brought yer to me own 'ome, gave you food and clothes—all outa the goodness of me own 'art. And now yer starts pipin' yer eye about it.

GOLDIE: I didn't know it was going to be like this. If I'd stopped back in Zanzibar, maybe they would have strung me up, and I should have been in hell by now—so you didn't save me such an awful lot, boss. This is hell all right—the only difference is I'm alive. I never thought I'd get to thinking life wasn't worth living—well, this life isn't—and that's the truth.

BERGMAN: If that's how yer feel about it, dearie, don't waste no time talking to me. You can't git away—not unless you goes by yerself.

GOLDIE (*pleading*): Boss—couldn't you chuck this God-forsaken job and take me south to the coast—some place where there's life and real men and women. You hate this place. I know you do.

BERGMAN: Didn't I tell yer——

GOLDIE: You needn't tell me any more—I know a scared man when I see one.

[BERGMAN *stares at her for a long moment. Then, in a low voice:*

BERGMAN: D'you think I wouldn't git out of it—if there was half a chanst for me on the coast? But there ain't, dearie—there ain't. I try every chanst I git. I tried when I was last down in Zanzibar, but what skipper'd look at an old sailor with roomatiz in his bones and blackwater in 'is blood—eh? No, they knows my kind, dearie. I'm the sort that cracks up quick in a gale. No good—no bleed'n' good—that's me.

GOLDIE (*hopelessly*): One of these days I'll go crazy and make a run for it. (*Wildly*) It's no place for a woman, boss!

BERGMAN: Make a run for it, eh? (*He rises and takes a match-box from a drawer in the table and opens it—showing contents to GOLDIE.*) 'Ave a look at this.

GOLDIE (*recoiling*): What an awful thing!

BERGMAN: It's a white ant, dearie—a female. Fat, ain't she? It's not often you can catch 'em across they don't like the



light. 'They jest tunnel and tunnel under the 'ot earth—like little white satans. Sometimes they riddle the earth just like it was a 'oneycomb—and then you has to watch out, across the ground gives way under yer like a jelly, and you find yerself sittin' in the white ants—and that ain't nice, dearie—it ain't nice at all. I seen a ninety-foot tree go crashing into the river all across o' these little white fellers tunnellin'. Funny, ain't it? (*Grabs her arm. She screams.*) Makes yer roar with laughter, don't it?

[*GOLDIE shudders and sinks on to the couch. Bursts into a storm of tears. BERGMAN puts the match-box away and stares at her awkwardly. Then goes and sits close to her—putting his arm round her.*

'Ere, pipe down, dearie. It ain't that bad. I didn't meanta scare yer. I jest thought I'd warn yer, that's all. Come on now, shake up and give us a smile. Goldie—listen—I like yer, honest I do. It's good to come back and find you here after I bin drivin' them blacks. When I sees you sittin' here so cool and white, it—it makes me remember that I'm white, too. It's the only thing I got here to help me remember. You makes the place like 'ome, dearie. Look at them curtains you put up now. It's a treat to look at 'em. You stick 'ere with me. We'll rub along all right—see if we don't.

[*She stops crying and reaches for a cigarette from box on table.*

GOLDIE (*in a dead voice*): Guess we'll have to.

[*He looks into cigarette-box.*

BERGMAN: You ain't got many left, dearie. I'll git some sent up with the stores next time. (*Eagerly*) Anything else you'd like? Beads, eh? Or a pretty 'at?

[*She rocks to and fro in silence.*

You liked that wrap I give you, didn't yer, dearie? Red suits yer some'ow. Makes yer feel good, don't it?

GOLDIE: Yes—if there was someone to look at me.

BERGMAN: 'Ere, come on—cheer up. You've 'ad a good cry. What about a little dance?

[*Goes to gramophone and winds it.*

'Member how I used to 'op round with you in that dive on the waterfront? I thought you was a queen—I did straight. The way you waltzed me round like a deck-washer on his first trip. Gawd, it was a treat.

*[He starts the music.]*

GOLDIE (*shouting*): I don't want to dance. Shut that thing up, will you?

*[He stops the record.]*

BERGMAN: I thought you liked dancin'?

GOLDIE: Not any more. If you want to dance, go and get Manuela, the long yellow cat.

BERGMAN: Mannywela? You ain't jealous of Manny, are yer?

GOLDIE: She gives me the jumps. What does she keep slinking in here for? Why don't she stay down with the blacks, where she belongs?

BERGMAN: Acooss she does good work and acooss she ain't black—that's why. She's arf and arf.

GOLDIE: She's a nigger.

BERGMAN: That's where yer wrong. You know who her father was, doncha? That poor crazy Portygeese I took over from. (*Slowly*) Bein' alone—with the blacks—sent 'im sort of potty—and 'e finished up thinkin' he was a nigger issself. (*Shudders.*) Manny's a kind of legacy. You don't want to take no notice of 'er. She ain't white—but she ain't black neither, and she don't git on with the niggers—so you as to 'umour 'er.

GOLDIE: Humour her? What for?

BERGMAN: Well, she's useful, ain't she? Talks my lingo and theirs—after a fashion. I tell 'er what I want and she tells the boys—tells 'em a sight better than what I could. So don't start puttin' her back up, for Pete's sake.

GOLDIE: All right, only I'd be grateful if she'd keep out of my room.

BERGMAN: Your room? She don't go in there?

GOLDIE: Oh, yes, she does. I found her there yesterday trying on my expensive wardrobe. She wasn't a bit upset when I found her—just asked me if she could help herself to the pretties.

BERGMAN: Whadya do ?

GOLDIE: Do ? I kicked her out.

BERGMAN: Hey—steady—steady !

GOLDIE: What did you expect me to do ? Kiss her ?

BERGMAN: You want to be careful o' them half-breeds, dearie; they got yeller blood.

GOLDIE: Go on, tell me some more fairy tales. I'm in the mood to-night.

BERGMAN (*sourly*): Sure. P'raps you'd like me to arst you some riddles, too ? Then we could play nuts an' may, and 'ave a really jolly evenin' !

GOLDIE (*starting*): What was that ?

BERGMAN (*reaching for the bottle*): What was what ?

GOLDIE: I thought I heard someone shout.

BERGMAN: Well, what if yer did ? Them boys is always shoutin'—they ain't got no class like you an' me.

GOLDIE: No. It was a long way away.

[*There is a faint cry from a distance.*]

There ! Did you hear it ?

BERGMAN: Oh, for Gawd's sake, dearie, 'ave a drink. You give me the jitters.

GOLDIE: Make it a good one.

BERGMAN: Sure, sure. Plenty here, dearie. (*Pours.*) Good stuff this—real genuine firewater.

[*Comes over with drinks.*]

Ere y'are, me liddle cocksparrer.

GOLDIE (*taking and raising glass*): Schol !

BERGMAN: Praise the Lord.

*[They drink. BERGMAN goes to the gramophone.*

Now let's dance. Come on !

GOLDIE: You can't dance !

BERGMAN: Carnt I ? I can 'op round all right. You watch me !

*[Drags her off the sofa and clumps round the room with her, trolling out the tune of the gramophone.*

GOLDIE: Don't hold me so tight, boss. I can't breathe.

BERGMAN: What's the good of dancing if I can't 'ug yer ?

*[The curtains part, and MANUELA appears in the doorway R., leaning against the frame and watching them. There is a crude, feline grace about the lines of her slim, pale-brown body, which is attired in a gaudy sarong. She has a queer face, negroid and shrewd; her arms and ankles are encircled by brass rings, which jingle as she walks. For the moment BERGMAN and GOLDIE are unaware of her presence.*

GOLDIE: It crumples my wrap. You've got it all bunched up at the back.

BERGMAN *(loosening his hold)*: Sorry, dearie. Mustn't spoil yer party frock, must we ?

*[He catches sight of MANUELA and stops suddenly. Releases GOLDIE, who follows the direction of his gaze. As soon as she sees the half-caste, she goes to the gramophone and stops the music. BERGMAN advances on MANUELA menacingly.*

Manny ! Didn't I tell yer——

MANUELA: I know, boss—I know. I bang the floor, but you don't hear me.

*[She speaks in a soft, rather thick voice, clipping her words sharply.*

You tol' me come tell you when the ivory come——

BERGMAN *(impatiently)*: Yes—yes, never mind. To-morrow'll do. Now clear out. *(She makes no move.)* Go on, oppit.

MANUELA: The boys don' unload to-morrow, boss.

BERGMAN: Don't unload? Wassamatter with 'em?

MANUELA: Derss a goddam nigger dying. He yell.

BERGMAN (*infuriated*): Oh, Gawd A'mighty! What's it matter if fifty of 'em dies—the stuff gotta be dumped, ain't it? (*Turns to GOLDIE*) Every time one o' these black devils croaks they makes a public 'oliday of it—then they 'ave another one at the funeral. Fine state the world'd be in if the whites behaved like that! After the War there wouldn't 'ave been no work done for three 'undred years!

MANUELA: Dass what I say, boss. They don' lissen me.

BERGMAN: 'Ow long'll 'e be dyin'?

MANUELA (*shrugging*): One day—two day—donno. He's out there—in swamp.

BERGMAN: He's in the swamp!

[*GOLDIE catches her breath.*

If that ain't the bleed'n' limit! Don't those boys know the way acrost that place yet? They was born here, wasn't they? Two days—an' all that stuff piling up! Jeesy!

MANUELA: You go talk 'em, boss.

BERGMAN: Sure I'll talk 'em. Git my rib-tickler.

[*MANUELA goes off. R. BERGMAN struggles hastily into a ragged leather jacket. GOLDIE watches him, breathing quickly.*

GOLDIE (*faintly*): You ain't going to leave him there, boss?

BERGMAN: Leave who where?

GOLDIE: That man in the swamp.

BERGMAN (*sweetly*): Ho no, of course not. I'm going to take off me shoes an' socks and 'ave a nice little paddle among the alligators. I always like a bit o' fun.

GOLDIE: But you got to do *something*. You can't leave a man like that when he's dyin' 'most on your front porch.

BERGMAN: Can't I? When you bin 'ere a bit longer you'll know bettern to go splashing up to your waist in a stinkin' swamp ninety miles square in the pitch dark trying to find a godless 'eathen—



GOLDIE (*horrified*): Don't, boss ! It's murder !

[*Claps her hand to her mouth.*]

BERGMAN: That's not a pleasant word, dearie. Be careful 'ow you use it.

GOLDIE: It's true. Whatever you say. If I've got to listen to those yells in the swamp for two days, I reckon I'll go clean crazy.

BERGMAN: No, yer won't. You'll sleep an' eat same as the rest of us. See if yer don't !

[*MANUELA comes back with a leather thong, which BERGMAN snatches from her.*]

I'll show them black beauties 'ow to celebrate a funeral. Two days ! Not if I knows it.

[*Stamps out, slapping the thong on his boot. MANUELA remains behind, staring fixedly at GOLDIE's red wrap.*]

GOLDIE: Manuela. Isn't there any way you can get that man out ?

MANUELA (*coldly*): No. He find his own way out—or he die. (*Slaps her hands together sharply.*) Alligator get um.

[*GOLDIE shrinks back.*]

GOLDIE: If he knew where the village was, he could make for it, couldn't he ? (*Suddenly*) Why don't you light a fire ?

MANUELA: Uh ?

GOLDIE: On the edge of the swamp—it'd show him the way, wouldn't it ?

MANUELA: Fire ? Why should I light a fire ? I quite happy here.

GOLDIE: You could get the boys to do it. It's quite easy. Why don't they do it ?

MANUELA: Scared. Swamp get goddam wild if black feller get away.

GOLDIE: They'd do it if you told them, wouldn't they ?

MANUELA: Maybe.

GOLDIE: Well, go on—why don't you ?

MANUELA (*shrugging*): Maybe I jez don' want to.

GOLDIE (*fiercely*): Well—what'll you take to do it then?

MANUELA (*smiling*): I think perhaps that red silk piece look good on me.

[GOLDIE jumps up and strips off the gown, hurling it on the floor. Dressed only in her slip, her white skin gleams sharply in contrast with the half-caste.

GOLDIE: Now get out and get that fire lit. Take care of the boss or he'll get wild.

[MANUELA picks up the gown with undisguised joy.

Go on—put a jerk in it.

[MANUELA holds up the gown and surveys it greedily. She slips it on, in no apparent hurry, and holds it round her closely. Parades up and down in sheer ecstasy.

Get out, will you!

[MANUELA smiles loftily at GOLDIE, and then flaunts out of the shack with cat-like tread.

GOLDIE goes to the window, peering through the darkness after MANUELA, then turns and goes to a curtained cupboard in the corner of the room. Selects a soiled green overall, which she slips on with an expression of disgust, knotting the belt at her waist. Takes a cigarette from table, sits on sofa and lights up, lies back and inhales deeply, blowing smoke in a straight line over her head.

There is a step outside. She sits up, pushing the hair off her brow with a nervous gesture. BERGMAN clumps in, pulling the thong through his hands savagely. Flings it into a corner of the room and strips off the leather jacket.

BERGMAN: Well, thet's another little job done. Now p'raps I can 'ave another drink in peace. (*Looking at GOLDIE*) 'Ullo—changed into yer evenin' dress?

[No answer.

Take it orf, dearie—makes the place look like a case-'ouse.

GOLDIE: I'm all right, boss—it's a change, isn't it? That's what we need round here.

BERGMAN: Yerce—it's a change all right—but it ain't your

colour, dearie. I like something bright an' lively—red's me favrit colour. What's the matter with the wrap I give yer?

GOLDIE: Oh, nothing—I just thought I'd give it a rest. I get tired of things, same as anyone else.

BERGMAN (*sitting beside her ingratiatingly*): I'll git yer another one. A yellor one—how'll that suit yer?

[*He puts his hand on hers. She shakes it off with a shiver.*]

GOLDIE: Ugh! You're wet!

BERGMAN: Wet? 'Ow d'you mean?

[*She takes his hand by the fingers, turns it over, looking at the palm. Shrinks back.*]

GOLDIE: Go and wash that off, will you?

BERGMAN: Eh? (*Looks at his palm.*) Oh, that ain't nothin'. Jest a bit of nigger juice.

GOLDIE (*tensely*): It may be your favourite colour, but it ain't mine.

[*Rubs her hand on the overall.*]

Go wash it off, will you?

BERGMAN (*getting up sullenly*): I 'ad a wash yesday.

GOLDIE: Watch out. You might make a habit of it.

[*He goes into room R., and is heard rattling a bucket.*]

BERGMAN (*off*): Blimey! It's cold.

[*GOLDIE gets up and goes to the corner of the room, picking up the thong between her finger and thumb. Holds it away from her for a moment, repelled, then goes to the window, opens it, and flings the thong into the darkness.*]

BERGMAN (*off*): Shut that winder, dearie—there's smoke driftin' in somewhere.

[*GOLDIE looks towards his room, scared, then shuts the window, drawing the curtain.*]

'Ave the boys set up a fire out there?

GOLDIE (*with her back to the window*): No—I don't see anything. It's black as ink.

[BERGMAN comes back, holds his wet hands away from him. Goes to the door curtain and wipes his hands on it.]

BERGMAN: Can't stand the smell o' wood smoke—stick in me gullet all night. Too many smells round 'ere already.

GOLDIE (*going left*): Well, maybe I'll go to bed.

BERGMAN: 'Ere, not yet, dearie. There's plenty of time to sleep.

GOLDIE: That's it, boss. What do I have to bother about time for? It don't mean anything here. Anyway, I'd as soon be asleep as sitting in this place twiddling me thumbs.

BERGMAN: 'Ave an 'art, Goldie. It's seven hours to dawn. What am I going to do stuck in 'ere all on me lonesome?

GOLDIE: I know what you're going to do, whether I'm here or not. (*Fiercely*) You're going to sit at that table and soak yourself unconscious. That's what you're going to do. I know your pretty little ways.

[*She collects her cigarette-box and handbag from the table.*]

BERGMAN: I'll lay off it to-night, dearie.

GOLDIE: I know—like you did last night.

BERGMAN: I don't fancy bein' here on me own, Goldie. I—I got kinda used to yer.

[*She goes towards her room. He follows.*]

BERGMAN: Let me come in——

GOLDIE (*turning on him savagely*): You stop where you are!

[*He backs away to the table and picks up the bottle. GOLDIE glares at him.*]

BERGMAN: Well, 'ave a drop o' tiddley before yer pipe down.

[*Before she can answer there is a dull thud outside. BERGMAN looks sharply towards the door, the bottle poised in his hand.*]

Is that Manny skulking round again?

[*He drops the bottle on the table.*]

I'll tell 'er somethin'!

[GOLDIE slips across in front of him, putting her things down on the sofa. Draws back the window curtain and peers out. BERGMAN stares after her. Suddenly he points over her shoulder.

BERGMAN: There's a fire over yonder ! I told yer there was !

[GOLDIE stands rigid for a moment, and then backs away—staring at the window in mute terror.

GOLDIE (in a suppressed voice): There's—something—moving out there—boss. Something—alive.

BERGMAN (pulling her away and going to window): What the 'ell are you talkin' about ? (He looks out.) Holy Christ !

GOLDIE (screaming): No—no ! Don't let it come in, boss ! Don't let it come in !

[She rushes into her room L., slamming the door. BERGMAN stands petrified, his eyes glued on the curtain over the door. Jumps to life looking about him wildly. Dashes to the table and snatches a heavy, rusty revolver from the drawer. Then stands with a strange animal crouch, pointing the gun at the curtain.

Slow footsteps drag nearer and nearer—and suddenly a slimy hand appears through the curtain, flinging it back.

A terrifying figure stands framed in the doorway. From head to foot it is covered in black slime—which oozes slowly down on to the floor. Two white eyes stare out of the black mess.

BERGMAN (hoarsely): Who are yer ?

[He cocks the gun. The figure raises a hand, waving it away.

STRANGER: Don' do that—put it down.

[Staggered, BERGMAN drops the gun. It clatters to the floor as he leaps forward, running a finger down the man's arm.

BERGMAN (madly): You're white ! You're white !

[The man nods and lurches towards the table—looking down at the bottle. BERGMAN yells excitedly.

Go on, mate ! Go on ! Drink it all—it's yours, mate. 'Ere, wait a jiffy—— !

[He rushes to the curtained cupboard and tears down a ragged shirt. Hurls it across to the man, who catches it and rubs the filth



*from his face. Meanwhile BERGMAN pours out a glass of rum and pushes it into the man's hand.*

Swaller it quick—go on.

*[The man drinks and then sinks heavily into a chair.]*

STRANGER: Good. *(Holds out the empty glass.)*

BERGMAN *(filling it)*: Who are yer—eh?

STRANGER: Vandeker. *(Surveying his clothes)* Nice healthy country you got round here.

BERGMAN: Vandeker? What's that? Dutchy?

VANDEKER: No—'Frikander.

BERGMAN: What you bin doin', mate? 'Ow d'you git in that lousy swamp?

VANDEKER: Just walked into it—couldn't keep on the track in the dark.

BERGMAN: Well—you're a lucky swab—Gawd strike me dead if you ain't! Gits lost in the swamp at night—and then gits out of it! Didn't you strike no alligators?

VANDEKER: Sure. They would have got me, too—if you hadn't lit that fire. Thanks a lot, chum.

BERGMAN: Fire?

VANDEKER: It put me right on the track. I was only 'bout three hundred yards from this place. Heard me yell, didn't you?

BERGMAN *(bewildered)*: Sure—sure—we heard you yell, chum. Thought it was a nigger.

VANDEKER: Well, you saved an honest-to-God white man instead. Good for you, boss.

*[Holds out his hand.]*

BERGMAN *(shaking it)*: Oh—that's all right, mate. Glad you git out of it safe. It ain't everyone that do.

VANDEKER *(rising)*: Maybe I could loan an outfit till I get cleaned up; then we can talk. Don't like to trouble you, chum, but this slime ain't exactly comfortable.

BERGMAN: Yerce ! (*Jerks his thumb towards door R.*) You'll find a pair o' duds in the chest there—pair o' slacks and a shirt, anyway. Help yourself, mate.

VANDEKER: Thanks, I will. Sorry to make your place stink.

BERGMAN: Don't you worry, mate. There's a bucket o' water in there, too. It's a bit muddy, across I just 'ad a wash meself—but it'll git the worst off.

[VANDEKER *goes into the room R.*

VANDEKER (*off*): That's fine. Shan't keep you long, chum.

[BERGMAN *stands looking at the door—and then across at GOLDIE'S room. Scratches his head. Sits at the table, takes another drink, then fetches out his pipe and begins to fill it.*

BERGMAN: 'Ow d'you come to be in these parts, matey ?

VANDEKER (*off*): Trying to work a cut through the bush.

BERGMAN: Yerce—I know. But where yer from ?

VANDEKER (*off*): Tshilongo.

BERGMAN: Tshilongo ! Jeesy—that's a tidy step.

VANDEKER (*off*): Sure—don't I know it.

BERGMAN: What are yer ? Trader—or jest a bum ?

VANDEKER (*off*): Well, kind of a trader. Things got slack in my country—so I packed up and made for the coast. I been God knows how long.

BERGMAN: Pretty well all-in, ainch a ?

VANDEKER (*off*): Oh, so-so.

BERGMAN (*cautiously*): Goin' stay long ?

VANDEKER (*off*): No. I got to keep moving. Must get to the coast this month. There's an Australian boat due in at Kilimani on the twenty-fourth. Want to get on it. Be off again to-morrow.

BERGMAN (*relieved*): Well—if yer must, yer must. Wish I c'd come with yer, matey. I ain't good for a seaman no more. Caught the blackwater five year back. Ain't never bin the same since.

VANDEKER (*off*): I steered clear of the fever so far. I'm getting away from it for keeps.

BERGMAN: That's wise. That's very wise.

[*He lights his pipe. Puffs at it and smacks the match-box on top of the bowl to draw it.*]

GOLDIE's door opens slowly, and she comes out, looking questioningly at BERGMAN, who jumps up in alarm, snatching the pipe out of his mouth. Creeps across the room and softly closes the door of VANDEKER's room.

BERGMAN (*swinging round*): Git back !

GOLDIE (*softly*): Who is it ?

BERGMAN (*in a hoarse whisper*): A white !

GOLDIE (*amazed*): A white !

BERGMAN: Yerce—come out the swamp. You don't want 'im to see yer, do yer ? He'll let on about you when he gits to the coast—and then they'll come for yer ! Go on ! Git back !

GOLDIE: Don't be silly—he don't know anything. I want to see him. I ain't seen a white man in three months.

BERGMAN: Oh, no ! Whadya think I am ? A cockroach ?

GOLDIE (*eagerly*): Go on, boss. Let me see him !

BERGMAN (*furious*): You git back there, or I'll flay yer bleed'n' skin off.

[*GOLDIE backs towards her room.*]

Git into bed and go to sleep !

GOLDIE: What are you going to do with him ?

BERGMAN: I'll fix it ! I jest don't want him around, see ? He'll go all right. He said so.

GOLDIE (*half to herself*): A white man !

[*BERGMAN pushes her back into her room and shuts the door, locking it. Leaves the key in the outside. Comes back to table and lights his pipe again, raising his eyes now and then to look at the doors R. and L.*]

VANDEKER comes out in clean shirt and slacks, holding his muddy jacket over his arm. He is tall and muscular, with a strong, lean face, and long limbs. He grins as BERGMAN stares at him.

VANDEKER: How do I look?

BERGMAN: Certainly makes a difference, matey. You looked like the wild man o' Borneo when you first come in.

VANDEKER: Yeh. I was pretty wild. Is it all off?

BERGMAN (*examining him*): There's a bit jest 'ere, matey—and 'ere. (*Rubs at the places with the shirt.*) Thassit.

VANDEKER: By the way, chum, what's your name?

BERGMAN: Bergman. Chas. Bergman. They calls me "boss."

VANDEKER (*saluting*): O.K., boss.

BERGMAN: Look 'ere, matey. You'd like something t'eat, wouldn't yer? Come on down the stores. The boys'll fix yer up a blow-out.

VANDEKER: No, boss, that's all right. I couldn't eat a thing, not yet. My mouth's still full o' your swamp, Phew! What a place!

BERGMAN (*ruffled*): Aw, come on—you can't jest stick 'ere with nuthin' in yer stummik. It ain't right.

VANDEKER: I can't eat, boss—that's the truth. Fix me a drink—that's all I want. I got no appetite—not yet.

[*He goes to the sofa and sits with the jacket spread on his knees.*]

BERGMAN (*sullenly*): You'll 'ave to wait till morning if yer don't eat nothin' now.

VANDEKER: That's all right. I can wait.

[BERGMAN goes to the table. While he is pouring out the drinks, VANDEKER finds GOLDIE's bag beside him on the couch. He picks it up and turns it over in his hands with interest. He is about to say something to BERGMAN, who has his back to him, but changes his mind, putting the bag down again.]

BERGMAN comes over with the drinks. He sees the jacket on VANDEKER's knee.

BERGMAN: You better put that outside, matey. Smelly, ain't it?

VANDEKER (*taking drink*): I was going to give it a clean-up.

BERGMAN (*going to take it*): 'The boys'll do it. Let's 'ang it in the porch.

VANDEKER (*putting his hand on it*): No—you done enough for me, boss. I'll fix it all right.

[*Points to a great splodge of slime on the back.*

Phoooooooo ! Look at that ! Wants a spade on it.

[*Turns it upside down and grabs the shirt he used for his face. Scrubs at the jacket.*

*A white, folded slip of paper falls from the inverted pocket and flutters to the floor. He does not notice it, but BERGMAN spots it at once and stares at it craftily.*

VANDEKER: What sort of mud d'you call this ? Looks like ink and smells like—well, I dunno !

[*Stands up and comes forward, holding the jacket under the light.*

BERGMAN *stoops quickly behind his back and picks up the paper. Holding it behind him, he goes to the table, unfolds it and reads. Stands rigid for a moment and then crashes his fist on the table.*

VANDEKER *spins round.*

BERGMAN (*infuriated*): Why didn't you tell me you was from the police ?

VANDEKER (*dropping the jacket*): Give me that !

[*Snatches the paper away.*

BERGMAN: Why didn't yer ?

VANDEKER (*pocketing the paper*): You know now, don't you ?

BERGMAN (*in a panic*): Whadya want ?

VANDEKER: You know what I want !

BERGMAN: I'll be stuck if I do—you goddam liar !

VANDEKER: Yes, you do. I'm after Goldie Brandt—the dame you got hidden away here.

[BERGMAN *makes a sudden move towards him.*

VANDEKER: Don't you get funny, boss. I'm the law here, see ? And I've taken your gun. (*Taps his pocket.*) Thought there'd be trouble.



BERGMAN: So that's what I git for playing the white man, eh?

VANDEKER: Comes hard, maybe. But it wasn't no accident I come this way.

BERGMAN (*wildly*): Why didn't you stop in that swamp? Why didn't the 'gaters git you? (*Suddenly*) It was that fire—that cussed fire brought you 'ere! God dammit, oo's bin playing tricks round here?

VANDEKER: Hey! Cool off, boss. I got to take that woman back to Zanzibar. Where is she? In there?

[*Indicates GOLDIE's room.*]

BERGMAN: If she goes back, they'll string 'er up.

VANDEKER: She done murder.

BERGMAN: She only knifed a dirty dago. That ain't murder!

VANDEKER: You ain't the law, boss. And that dago weren't so dirty, neither. He was the skipper of a fruit boat and his Company is kickin' up hell about it. I got sent to track the killer—and I got 'er!

BERGMAN: Oh, no, you ain't! Wait till yer tries to drag 'er over ninety mile of swamp. She'll fight like the 'ell-cat she is—and you won't git no 'elp from me!

[*VANDEKER stares at him darkly.*]

Ain't so easy, is it, mate? The girl didn't do no murder—no, sir! That drunken dago wanted to take 'er on the boat with him—and yer knows what that means, doncha? Well, she knew what it meant, too—and she says, "No." So he outs with a knife and threatens to stick 'er. She gits panicky an' knocks the knife out of his hand—an' when 'e comes for 'er agin, she sticks him in the ribs. That wasn't murder—it was justice—good and proper!

VANDEKER: Sounds like she got some spirit.

BERGMAN: Sure. You'll never git 'er back to Zanzibar, matey. I'll tell 'er what you come for, then you'll see for yourself.

[*Goes towards GOLDIE's door.*]

VANDEKER (*darting to the door*): I think I'll have a little chat with her first.

[BERGMAN *turns, planting himself against the door.*

BERGMAN: You leave her be! (*Pleading*) She's all I got, matey. She keeps me from goin' loco—let 'er alone, will yer? Be a white man—she ain't no criminal—honest she ain't. She's a good kid.

[VANDEKER *pulls the gun out of his pocket.*

VANDEKER: Get away from there. (BERGMAN *comes away.*) And get out of this shack. You're not going to talk to your fancy bit no more.

BERGMAN: What? I'll be damned.

VANDEKER: Go on! Get out! I don't want you spilling your trap. I got work to do.

BERGMAN: I stick here.

VANDEKER (*advancing menacingly*): D'you want me to plug you?

BERGMAN (*suddenly meek*): All right, matey. Maybe I will go. (*Craftily*) Maybe I will.

[*He backs through the door and vanishes.*

VANDEKER (*calling after him*): And don't put your nose in here till I'm through with the lady.

[*He turns and goes towards GOLDIE's door. Before he can reach it, there is a soft knocking from the other side. VANDEKER stops at once and pockets the gun. Goes quietly to the door and turns the key. GOLDIE steps out. She has smartened herself up a good deal, dressed in a light, simple frock with a bright scarf round her neck. She smiles at him.*

GOLDIE: Well, well. This is a break for me. Who are you, stranger?

[VANDEKER *stares at her in admiration.*

VANDEKER: Johnny Vandeker.

GOLDIE: Surprised to see me?

VANDEKER: Well, it's certainly a *pleasant* surprise, lady.

GOLDIE: Didn't know they grew white women in these parts, eh?

VANDEKER (*slowly*): No, I didn't.

GOLDIE (*eagerly*): Will Bergman be gone long?

VANDEKER: Yes—he's gone to fix something.

GOLDIE (*smiling*): He didn't want me to see you. Jealous, I guess.

VANDEKER (*smiling back*): Maybe.

GOLDIE: Where you bound for?

VANDEKER (*confused*): Oh—some place on the coast.

GOLDIE: You wouldn't—be going to Zanzibar?

[VANDEKER *stares at her, and realizes what she is getting at.*

VANDEKER (*dropping his eyes*): No—not Zanzibar.

GOLDIE: Where then?

VANDEKER: Right down south somewhere.

GOLDIE (*eagerly*): Good! Good! (*Comes close to him.*) Listen, Mr. Vandeker, I want you to take me with you—right down south.

VANDEKER: What? (*Points at her involuntarily.*) You want to get away?

GOLDIE (*urgently*): That's it. I can do it—I did the journey here. I won't be no trouble to you. An' I'll pay you—I'll pay you well.

[*Dives her hand into her bag and brings out a brooch and two rings.*

See! They're gold—and them's diamonds there. (*Pushing them towards him*) They're yours now—if you'll take me.

VANDEKER (*pushing her hand away*): What's the idea, lady?

GOLDIE: Well—this is no place for a woman, is it? It gives me the cold horrors. And that devil Bergman wants to keep me here because he's scared of it himself. Scared of going native—that's what he is.

VANDEKER (*shrewdly*): Ah! I see!

GOLDIE: It's a shocking life, this is. You'll help me get out of it, won't you?

VANDEKER (*slowly, almost to himself*): Yeh—maybe I will.

[*He half smiles.*]

GOLDIE (*joyfully*): Oh, thank God! I prayed every night someone would come and fetch me out of here—and now it's come true. God ain't so bad after all.

VANDEKER: Bergman mustn't know about it. You mustn't see him again, you understand?

GOLDIE: Sure. I don't want to see him ever again. He did his best to keep me here, but I knew he couldn't do it. I knew I could get away. (*Eagerly*) Where'll we make for? Durban?

VANDEKER (*hesitating*): If you want to—anywhere you fancy. Makes no difference to me.

GOLDIE: That'll do fine. You can get boats to any place from there, can't you?

VANDEKER: Yes—any place. Now listen. We got to get away now.

GOLDIE (*astonished*): Now? In the dark?

VANDEKER: I don't want you to see Bergman again. I've an idea he'll make trouble.

GOLDIE (*excitedly*): Sure he will. He's scared stiff of himself.

VANDEKER: We'll go down river and camp near the falls till dawn.

GOLDIE: That's the idea, Johnny—then there won't be no trouble. (*Laughing*) Jest fancy! I'm leaving this place—leaving it for ever. Going down south, where the orange trees grow. Oh, Lord—I'm so happy! (*Seizes his arm.*) You wouldn't fool a girl, would you, mister?

VANDEKER (*glancing at her sharply*): Fool you? Why—no.

GOLDIE: I like you, Johnny.

VANDEKER: Uh?

GOLDIE: Haven't fallen for me, have you? If you have, you're a pretty fast worker.

VANDEKER (*smiling grimly*): Not quite the time and place, lady.

GOLDIE: Well, here's a " 'Thank you,' " anyway.

[*She kisses him suddenly.*]

Now we'll get going, uh? We don't want to run up against that old devil.

[*Runs into her room. VANDEKER gazes after her with a strange misery in his eyes. Walks across the room, collecting jacket and pack, throwing the jacket over his arm. Stands gloomily waiting for GOLDIE, who returns a moment later in a thick mackintosh and rubber boots.*]

GOLDIE (*seizing his hand*): All right—come on!

[*VANDEKER stands where he is, looking suspiciously at the doorway.*]

VANDEKER: Wait! (*Pause.*) There's somebody out there.

[*GOLDIE rushes to the window and peeps through the curtains. Turns, her face terrified.*]

GOLDIE: He's coming back!

VANDEKER (*calmly*): Get in there and lock yourself in. (*Points to GOLDIE's room.*) Don't come out till I say.

GOLDIE: Don't let him hurt you, Johnny. He's a killer.

VANDEKER: Hurt me! I should worry!

[*She disappears into the room, shutting the door and locking it. VANDEKER stands watching the curtained doorway.*]

VANDEKER: Come on in, if you're going to!

[*A sudden shot rings out, and the curtain flutters. Simultaneously VANDEKER ducks and then dives for the curtain, tearing it down. BERGMAN stands there with a smoking rifle in his hand. VANDEKER drags him in, pulling the gun away.*]

You need target practice.

GOLDIE (*off*): Johnny! Johnny!

VANDEKER: It's all right—stop where you are! (*Turning to BERGMAN*) You're going to be sorry for this, all right.



BERGMAN: You ain't going to take 'er, see !

[VANDEKER *throws the rifle into a corner and pulls the rusty revolver from his pocket.*

VANDEKER: That's where you're wrong. She didn't need no persuasion. She's coming with me—and coming quiet. (*Covering him*) And I'm going to rope you up in that room till we're gone.

BERGMAN: Goin' with yer, is she ? Yer dirty liar ! You told 'er some tale—that's what you done ! You ain't told 'er what you want 'er for, 'ave yer ?

[*Rushes to GOLDIE's door and hammers on it.*

Goldie ! Goldie ! Don't you go with 'im. He's a bleed'n' liar——

[VANDEKER *rams the gun in the middle of his back.*

VANDEKER: Shut up—or I'll finish you.

[BERGMAN *subsides abruptly and comes away from the door, half sobbing.*

BERGMAN (*in a quivering voice*): It ain't fair, matey—you ain't playin' fair.

[VANDEKER *jerks his head towards the door L.*

VANDEKER: Get in there.

[*At this moment MANUELA bursts in, still dressed in the red wrap. There is a look of wild terror on her face.*

MANUELA: What's that, boss ? I think you get shot.

VANDEKER: You stop where you are !

[MANUELA *stares at him in utter astonishment, and backs away as she sees the gun.*

BERGMAN (*glaring at the wrap*): What you got on ? You take that off, yer yellor cat ! That's my Goldie's. I give it 'er.

[*She looks down at the wrap and then eyes him sullenly.*

MANUELA: No—I don't take it off. The lady she give it to me.

BERGMAN: Give it to yer ! I'll show yer !

[*He rushes at her and tears the wrap from her back.*

VANDEKER (*shouting*): Get away from her !

[BERGMAN *falls back, dropping the wrap on the floor.*

MANUELA (*furious*): I don' lie ! She give it to me 'cos I make a fire for her. It's true !

[VANDEKER *looks up.*

BERGMAN: Fire ? What fire ?

MANUELA: She says I go tell boys to light a fire on the swamp to guide white boss. (*Looks at VANDEKER with a slow smile.*) She think he wass a poor goddam nigger.

BERGMAN: Goldie done that, did she ? It was 'er all the time, eh ? The poor silly little meddler.

VANDEKER: Didn't you light that fire, boss ?

MANUELA: No. He hear you—but he don' light no fire.

VANDEKER: You were going to leave me there to rot ? (*Glares at BERGMAN.*) You played the white man all right. (*Swings round at GOLDIE's door.*) And the only soul among you with a spark of human decency left in her is a murderess. Speaks well for you—don't it, boss ?

BERGMAN: I didn't know—I didn't know—I thought you was a nigger, matey.

[VANDEKER *looks at GOLDIE's door again, and then turns, pushing the gun into his pocket. Picks up his pack.*

BERGMAN (*joyfully*): You're goin' ? You ain't goin' to take 'er ?

VANDEKER: There's some things I just can't do, boss. That poor little pro saved my skin—and I lied to her so I could get her away and have her strung up on the end of a rope. No—not this time.

BERGMAN (*wildly*): Good for you, boy ! Go on—orf you go. You can keep the duds—I got plenty.

VANDEKER: Thank you kindly.

BERGMAN: And don't go and souse yerself in that bleed'n' swamp agin.

VANDEKER: I'm sticking to the river this time.

BERGMAN: You done me a good turn, matey.

VANDEKER: You? It's just a pay-off. I'll report her dead.

*[There is a sudden silence. BERGMAN runs his hand nervously over his mouth, while MANUELA glares at VANDEKER in a cold fury. He goes to BERGMAN and seizes him by the front of the jacket savagely.]*

And listen. Be careful of that poor kid. She's scared, see? Be decent to her—if you can. She's worth more than you'll ever know—you dirty drunken nigger.

*[Hurls him away violently.]*

BERGMAN: Nigger! I ain't no nigger.

VANDEKER: No. Maybe I'll go and apologise to the niggers.

*[He stamps out into the night. BERGMAN stares after him and then sinks into his chair exhaustedly.]*

MANUELA (darkly): The white lady stay here, uh?

BERGMAN: Sure, sure! She stays here all right.

*[Pours himself a drink and goes to the window, raising the glass in a toast.]*

'Ere's to yer—yer long-faced son of a chimpanzee!

*[He drinks thirstily, and then makes a dizzy effort to smarm down his hair and straighten his clothing. Goes quickly to GOLDIE's door and thumps on it.]*

Hi Goldie! Come on out, dearie! It's all right! Everything's all right.

*[The door opens and GOLDIE steps out, bewildered.]*

GOLDIE: Where's Johnny?

BERGMAN (exultantly): 'E's gorn, dearie! Gorn away! He ain't gointa take yer! Ain't it a treat?

*[GOLDIE stands still, staring at him stupefied.]*

GOLDIE (faintly): Gone? Not—going to take—me?

BERGMAN: No. I told 'im I wouldn't stand no 'arf larks—and 'e slung 'is 'ook.

*[Holds up the rum bottle, which is now empty. Throws it down.]*  
Let's 'ave another drink on it, eh, dearie?

*[Hurries out quickly through the door R. When he has gone, GOLDIE seems to awaken. She rushes wildly to the doorway C.]*

GOLDIE: Johnny! Johnny! (*She swings round and stares at MANUELA.*) Which way did he go?

MANUELA (*slowly*): He make through the swamp.

[GOLDIE turns again and rushes through the door into the night, calling:

GOLDIE (*off*): Johnny—Johnny! Wait for me! Don't leave me! Johnny—Johnny!

[MANUELA goes to the window and looks out after her. A moment later BERGMAN can be heard singing:

Two liddle fleas went out ter sea  
Upon a reel o' cotton.

[Comes into the room and dumps a full bottle of rum on the table.

BERGMAN: 'Ere we are, dearie. A nice drop o' tiddley for me liddle cocksparrer. (*Gazes round.*) Where is she?

[MANUELA shrugs. He goes across towards GOLDIE's room, picking up the red wrap on the way.

Come on, dearie, put this on and make yerself pretty. We're all nice and cosy now.

[Comes out again, looking about him, puzzled.

Where is she?

[Goes to MANUELA and drags her away from the window.

What 'appened to 'er?

MANUELA (*shrinking*): She go after white boss.

BERGMAN (*staggered*): She's gorn out? (*Shouting*) Gorn after 'im? Through the swamp?

[MANUELA shrugs and turns away. BERGMAN throws down the wrap and dashes past her through the door, shouting:

BERGMAN (*off*): Goldie! Goldie! Come back! You'll git drowned! Don't leave me, Goldie! Goldie! Where are yer?

[His voice fades away in the distance.

Alone, MANUELA strolls across the room, picks up the wrap and puts it on, pulling it tightly about her with a strange smile. Goes to the table where GOLDIE's handbag and cigarettes are still lying.

*Opens the bag and examines the contents casually—a mirror, lipstick, powder compact and pad. With sudden eagerness she props the mirror against the bottle and tries to make herself up as she has seen GOLDIE do.*

*Examines herself in the mirror with great satisfaction, and then takes a cigarette from the box, turning it over in her fingers. Puts it between her lips gingerly, strikes a match, lights up, and watches the smoke curl up from her mouth. Finding the sensation pleasant, she gets up and swaggers round the room, puffing at the cigarette and then holding it away from her to look at it.*

*Stops at the curtained cupboard and takes down some of GOLDIE's gaudy dresses and holds them against her critically. The cigarette smoke gets in her eyes, and then she begins to cough. Throws the frock to one side and begins to rub the smoke out of her eyes. Looks at the cigarette cautiously, and almost decides to throw it away—but changes her mind and tries again, drawing at it affectedly.*

*There are slow steps outside. She turns quickly and looks at the open doorway, then slinks away to the wall, leaning against it with the cigarette hanging from her lips. BERGMAN drags himself into the room. His boots and breeches are smothered in black mud, and he breathes heavily. Sinks into his chair, staring before him almost insanely, rocking his head to and fro.*

BERGMAN (*muttering*): My Goldie's in the swamp—my poor Goldie—she's in the swamp. I seed 'er.

*[With a fearful grimace he slaps his hands together and buries his head in his arms, sobbing.]*

BERGMAN: Oh, Christ—oh, suffering Christ!

*[Claps his hands to his ears, rocking his head again.]*

I loved my liddle Goldie—I loved my liddle cocksparrer—she's gorn now—my Goldie—she's dead.

*[He cries terribly. MANUELA comes to the table and pours out a drink.]*

MANUELA: Here—you take a drink, boss.

*[BERGMAN looks up and stares at her.]*

BERGMAN: What—— (*Faintly*) I thought I was seein' 'er.

*[Takes the drink, and then feels the texture of the wrap.]*

It's a pretty wrap, ain't it, Manny? You can 'ave it. She give it to yer—didn't she—my Goldie?



*[His voice trails off. He drinks and then rubs his hand over his face bewilderedly.]*

MANUELA looks at him, and then goes across to the gramophone, turning on the music. BERGMAN starts at the sound of the music, and then leaps up, throwing the glass away so that it smashes against the wall. MANUELA draws back.

Yerce—come on—let's dance. I—I don't want to think of it no more. It's too much for an ol' man.

*[Rushes to MANUELA, who hangs back, terrified of his expression.]*  
Come on, yer scrawny brown slug—dance, will yer !

*[He drags her into the middle of the room and clumps round with her, stumbling and staggering crazily.]*

*At last MANUELA pushes him away violently. He staggers against the table.*

MANUELA: You drunk white pig !

*[BERGMAN drops into his chair helplessly. MANUELA darts across to the gramophone and takes off the record, smashing it on the floor—then comes C., and throws off the red wrap. Her brown body gleams in the lamplight.]*

BERGMAN *(in a low, frightened voice)*: No, Manny—no !

*[But MANUELA begins to dance. It is a native dance this time, fascinating and repulsive. Sometimes she hardly moves at all, only touching the floor lightly with her toes. She works up to a wild, irregular rhythm, and begins to wail a low, repetitive theme.]*

BERGMAN leans forward, staring at her glassily, and then begins to beat mechanically on the table with his fists, drumming softly to the rhythm.

MANUELA dances faster—and BERGMAN suddenly begins to drum wildly, and then takes up the rhythm himself, roaring it out in a cracked, hysterical voice.

*The drumming rises to a frenzy.*

CURTAIN



Henrietta Drake-Brockman

THE BLISTER

*A Play*

## CHARACTERS

MYRTLE — a barmaid

GEORGES RUBENSTEIN — a pearl-buyer

SID KEELER — a seedy lawyer

CAPTAIN MUTCH — a master-pearler.

MURRAY — another pearler

BILL }  
PAT } young shell-openers

FRANCIS DURHAM — a pearler

AH CHI — a Chinese pearl-cleaner

NOTE.—A seventy-grain pearl is larger than a pea, but not as large as an ordinary marble.

SCENE: *The bar of a pub in a North Australian coastal town. A semicircular bar, with footrail, curves from centre back almost to the front, where the counter lifts to admit attendant. Behind the bar, a lavish array of bottles fills both walls. On the counter glasses, a jug of water, beer-pump handles, etc.—the usual paraphernalia of drinking. At the back, on the left, a curtainless window opens on a glimmer of pale jade sea, where luggers ride at anchor. A single branch of poinciana tree, aflame with blossom, makes a lovely picture of the window-scene, so sun-drenched that figures moving in the bar stand out in silhouette as they pass across. The window is so well to the left that the dazzle of it does not interfere with action. The walls of the room are made of stamped metal, painted a depressing lightish brown. Beneath the window stands a dingy small table and one or two bentwood chairs. The door to the street opens well back on the left side; no view is visible, but sunlight, streaming in, makes a vivid patch on the floor. Crotons in green-painted kerosene tins stand either side the doorway. By the left wall is placed a long cane lounge. Right and left that of audience.*

*Gesticulating before the bar stands GEORGES RUBENSTEIN, dressed in immaculate tussore trousers, a red cummerbund, a white shirt loudly striped in black, a note repeated in black and white suède shoes. No hat. He is small, alert and debonair, like a wagtail, with dark hair brilliantined and marcelled. His nails show a fine polish, and a magnificent solitaire diamond flashes with every wave of his hand, emphasizing quick dramatic speech.*

*Behind the bar MYRTLE, polishing glasses, listens to him with a smile. In the late twenties, fresh-complexioned (not entirely by Nature), her natural burnished auburn hair is the sort which invariably goes with a cheerful and generous disposition. A short-sleeved dress of mustard yellow washing silk moulds a good figure, slightly voluptuous. In her ears she wears large pearl buttons (real), but the flamboyant brooch at the neck of her dress is made of paste. Her finger-nails gleam like rubies.*

*RUBENSTEIN never smokes. The other men never cease.*

*RUBENSTEIN (lightly): Of all ze voomans I 'ave meet in ze wurld, Mam'zelle, you are ze mos' unkind ! (Warming up)*

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All applications for permission to perform this play must be made to the International One-Act Play Theatre, 60 Earlsfield Road, London, S.W.19.



'Ere I stay vun—two—tree 'orrible veeks in zis 'orrible pub, so zat I may buy ze *perles*. An' ze whole time eet ees 'ot as 'ell. An' ze mens, zey drink an zey play ze cards all ze day an' all ze night. An' ze good *perles*—zey stop in ze sea. An' all ze time you, Mam'zelle, you stop shut-up-cold—*gelée*—Shut up like ze—like ze ice in ze ice-box !

MYRTLE (*laughing*): Wish I was. (*Suddenly serious*) God, Frenchie, you're right. It's as hot as Hell. And lonesome as I'd be in Heaven.

RUBENSTEIN: Lonesome ? Lonesome ! 'Ow you mean to say ? Wen ze 'ole time I beg—I implore—I beseech—(*Wheedling*) Mam'zelle, someday even ze ice, eet mus' melt. . . .

MYRTLE: And when it's all melted, what then ? A nasty mess to clean up. No, Frenchie, I reckon this here block of ice has tried that melting game just once too often. And learnt sense enough to freeze again before it's too late. . . . No more melting for mine.

RUBENSTEIN (*indignant*): Ah, but you make ze fool of me ! 'Ow can you say like zat ? An' at ze same time in ze ears—ze leetle ears zat tempt ze teeth—you wear ze *perles* of ze Capitaine Mutch.

MYRTLE: Steady on. Give it a pull there. What's your game ?

RUBENSTEIN (*disgusted*): Zat feller ! Zat feller wiz ze 'air on ze chest and ze fingaires like ze fat cee-gars ! Non, non, *chérie*, 'e ees not ze arteest. *Mais moi*, I am of ze mos' *spirituel*. (*With suggestive smile*) An' ze *perles* in my safe are ze *perles* fit for ze ladies of Paris, for ze *aristos* of England.

MYRTLE (*amused, lightly*): Damned cheek you've got.

RUBENSTEIN: Me, I may 'ave ze cheek. But you 'ave not ze heart. Yet you are *adorable*, Myrteel. You are *adorable* like ze lily growing in, growing in—in one of zese 'orrible tins. . . . (*Waving to the crotons and warming to his subject*) A tigare-lily. A tigare lily zat ees crushed by bears ! 'E ees a bear, zat man called Mutch. Yet you . . .

[*Shrugs with meaning.*]

MYRTLE (*still lightly*): I'd like to know what proof you've got?

RUBENSTEIN: Eet ees ze *perles* of Mutch zat you wear.

MYRTLE: Oh, run away and chase yourself! These cost me a bob at the barber's.

RUBENSTEIN: *Mais non*. You cannot come zat over Georges Rubenstein. I see a *perle* once, I nevaire forget 'im. An' ze *perle* in ze right ear Mutch offer me for my parcel, las' year. Me, I do not buy. Zere ees a flaw. But you—you, Myrteel, eet zeem zat you buy?

MYRTLE (*suddenly desperate*): God, will you shut your mouth? Look here, you say you're—spiritual. All right. Can't you see that I'm as sick of this bloody life as you are?

SID (*entering from the street*): Tut, tut. Better not let the boss hear that declaration of annoyance, my dear. Bad for trade.

MYRTLE (*brightly*): Oh, hullo, Sid.

[SID KEELER is a weed of a man, not yet shaved, dressed in crumpled whites obviously worn for several days. But it's impossible to help feeling sorry for him: he's seen better days, been his own worst enemy, as his haggard sensitive face proclaims. He removes a battered topee, mops his forehead and replaces topee well on the back of his head.]

SID: Weather good for trade, anyhow, my dear, even if it has turned you sour. (*Leaning on the bar*) Cow of a day. Make it a double one, Myrtle. At the double, too, there's a good girl. And let's see you smile. (MYRTLE hands him glass and whisky bottle, and then pours water from jug, stopping at indication from Sid. He lifts the glass and all but drains it.) Aah—that's better.

[RUBENSTEIN, who has observed all this with an expression of disgust, shrugs his shoulders and walks across to the lounge, lowering himself daintily on to it. He takes a clean linen handkerchief from his pocket, inhales the scent of it, shakes it out, lies back and carefully covers his face with the handkerchief. SID and MYRTLE stand at the right-hand side of the bar, MYRTLE facing him as he leans across. They talk softly, with the ease of old friends.]

SID (*indicating RUBENSTEIN*): How much longer is dear little Ruby staying?

MYRTLE: Couldn't say. Sid, I do wish you wouldn't—

[*She hesitates.*]

SID (*good-humoured throughout passage with MYRTLE*): Come on. Out with it. No use breaking off short with me. I'll start to cross-examine if you hedge—see?

MYRTLE (*diffidently*): You shouldn't drink so much. Not on your own.

SID: Well I'll be jiggered! Turning Salvo? Seems to me it's time to call the boss in. If I can't get you sacked on two counts for spoiling trade, well, I'm no lawyer. But I never bear malice—see? My dear, you'd do much better to have one with me, and save us both.

MYRTLE: Don't pretend your dumb. (*Defiantly, with a toss of the head*) Anyhow, I'd be glad enough to get the sack.

SID: Most certainly you need a spot! Come, there's a good girl.

MYRTLE: You know I never do.

SID: Our pure little Myrtle. . . . (*Drains his glass.*) Well give me another. . . . My dear, when you start getting the blue willies (*he pours a second drink with careful precision*) you just take my tip and keep on spotting—the bright spots. (*He lifts his glass and gazes at it before drinking. MYRTLE turns aside with a gesture of impatience and despair.*) What'ud you do if you did get the sack? (*Slowly and curiously*) I had an idea—an utterly unfounded idea—see?—that possibly a young man called Durham—

MYRTLE (*wheeling round, on the defensive*): Leave him out.

SID: Even so. I thought as much. The point is— (*He begins to laugh at his own words.*) The point is—ha, hah—does Mutch think as I think? And if so—how much? (*Reprovingly to MYRTLE, who remains stony*) You should laugh, my dear. Really you should. Good for trade. By-law for barmaids: Laugh and the trade stays with you. Sniff—and you're left alone. Don't sniff, Myrtle. It's not becoming.

MYRTLE: Think you're mighty smart?

SID: Never, my dear. I leave that to you. Well, here's luck. And I never have liked Mutch, much.

MYRTLE (*deadly serious*): Oh, give it a bone. Look, Sid, you don't think the Captain could—could hurt Frank any way, do you?

SID: Ho, ho. So that is how the land lies? Six and eight, my dear, six and eight. Not a word of advice for less than six and eight—see? Cash on delivery.

MYRTLE (*bitterly, turning away*): Money. And whisky. That's you, Sid Keeler.

SID: Myrt. Come back here, Myrt. What's this about young Durham? What's the game?

MYRTLE: He wants me to marry him.

SID (*laughing*): Another good man gone wrong.

MYRTLE (*bursting out*): For God's sake——

SID: Mutch hasn't anything on you, has he? And I take it that Frankie Durham—well, he's got no false notions of—er—well, I mean to say . . .

MYRTLE: Frank knows all about me.

SID: And you all about Frankie, eh? Everything in the garden lovely. A nice fellow, Frankie. A good sort. Like me. You'll be pleased in a few years time, Mrs. Durham, when Frankie takes to drinking double whiskies. On his own.

MYRTLE (*hotly*): He won't. Not if I know it. The trouble is—— (*Appealingly*) Sid, he hates this life. Who wouldn't, the way he lives? It must be worse than death, outside, on a rotten little bit of a boat crawling with 'roaches. . . . Ugh. . . . Month after month. Nothing to do but open the slimy oysters, hoping to God you'll find a pearl. No one to talk to but rotten Japs. Oh, I'd love that, I would. Like hell!

SID: Yet just so the lords of creation sacrifice themselves daily for home and beauty! You don't surely expect queens and film-stars to go through life without pearls? Why, even barmaids——

MYRTLE: I'd go crazy. But it's all right for a man if he's got his own bungalow waiting for him. And a wife.



SID: And six squealing kids? Best Victorian manner. Oh, Myrtle dear!

MYRTLE: Why not?

SID: So that's what you're after: home, hubby and help to fill the vast empty spaces. . . .

MYRTLE: I'm not after—anything. But—

SID: But—you want to be married. You want to forget—all this.

MYRTLE: No. Heavens, Sid, d'you think I've not had chances? No. It's—just Frank.

SID (*dramatically, striking an attitude*): She loves him, my God! Francis Durham, Esquire, of Hip, Haw, Hants. The perfect specimen of an English gentleman. . . . What'll you do when Frankie wants to go Home—Home with a capital aitch, my dear?

MYRTLE: You're a devil. He won't want to. Not after we're married.

[*Noises outside, voices and footsteps. Enter CAPTAIN MUTCH and MURRAY. MUTCH dominates the room immediately, both in manner and person. A big chunk of a man in the forties, with rolling gait, square jowl, mahogany skin and penetrating disconcerting eyes which rove from face to face. He has a way of throwing his chest and reefing his pants, turning his roll into a swagger. His voice is loud, but good. He wears clean duck pants, but no coat. MURRAY flings his topee on to the little table, but MUTCH only pushes his on the back of his head. MURRAY is a nondescript, white-haired person, mainly noticeable because of his sycophantic attitude towards MUTCH. He is precise in speech and wears an immaculate white duck suit.*

MUTCH: G'day, Myrtle. What have you done to the weather? My shout, you coves. And make it snappy, Myrtle. We're doing a perish.

MYRTLE: What'll you have, Mr. Murray?

MURRAY: A schooner, thanks.

MUTCH: 'Lo, Sid. Too hot even for the law, eh? Well, what'll you have?



SID: G'day, Captain. Double whisky for me, thanks.

[MYRTLE is busy getting the drinks. MUTCH spies RUBENSTEIN asleep on the lounge and goes over.

MUTCH: And what have we here? (*He whisks the handkerchief off. RUBENSTEIN is disclosed asleep with his mouth open.*) Hell, it's the frog. Catching flies! (*He sniffs the handkerchief and roars with laughter.*) Lavender! Hey, Ruby darling, wake up. You don't look pretty like that.

RUBENSTEIN (*confused*): *Qu'est-ce qu'il y a?*

MUTCH: *Voulez vous drinker avec us?* Should say you needed one to take the taste away.

[*He dangles the handkerchief with show of disgust.*

RUBENSTEIN: Tank-you, monsieur, I am not dreinking to-day.

[*He retrieves handkerchief and primly replaces it over his face, resuming his former position.*

MUTCH (*reefing pants*): Have it your own way.

MYRTLE: That the lot? Oh, yours, Captain. The same as usual?

MUTCH: Not leaving me out? (*He laughs, knowing he could never possibly be left out. He flings down silver and leans on the bar. MURRAY is behind him, SID standing in the right hand corner. MUTCH leers at MYRTLE and says suggestively*): Sure, Myrt, always the same as usual.

[*MYRTLE hands him his drink. Gets change, etc., whilst the men drink.*

MURRAY: Here's luck, Captain!

MUTCH: All the best.

SID: I'll give you a toast. Gentlemen: The blushing bride.

MURRAY: What's this?

MUTCH (*laughing*): Don't mean to say you've found some poor fool willing to take you on, Sid?

SID (*grinning*): No such—er—misfortune, Captain. No. But it has come to my ears that a certain lady at present

contemplating the holy estate is none other than our dear Myrtle.

[*The men all wheel to stare at MYRTLE, glasses suspended.*]

MURRAY: Myrtle?

MUTCH: *Myrtle!*

SID: And the happy man is—Mr. Francis Durham.

MYRTLE (*furious*): What trash you talk, Sid Keeler!

MURRAY (*fussily*): Well, now you come to mention it, I did hear something.

MUTCH (*roughly*): You don't want to believe all you hear, Murray. You're old enough to know better. Well, Myrt, here's happiness. (*He raises his glass, staring hard at her.*) On thirty bob a week!

[*He gulps down the drink.*]

MYRTLE (*coolly*): The joke's on me, gentlemen. Believe it or not. Just as you like. You're welcome.

[*She turns away and starts tidying. Slightly embarrassed, the men drink with sighs of pleasure.*]

MURRAY: Aah, that's most refreshing.

SID (*mocking*): Highly beneficial.

MUTCH: Have another?

MURRAY: My turn, I think.

SID (*foreseeing his turn coming*): How about a two-bob in?

MUTCH (*sarcastic*): Mr. Keeler suggests a two-bob in.

SID (*to MYRTLE*): Have you got the cards handy, Myrt?

[*MYRTLE moves to the right-hand corner of bar and bends down to find the cards. SID follows her on the outside of the bar. She whispers across at him vehemently, whilst the other men talk in the background.*]

MYRTLE: You're a nice one. What in hell do you mean by interfering like that? Mutch is wild.

SID: A few words in public save rows in private. See?

MYRTLE (*viciously*): You're like a blow-fly buzzing round a sore.

SID: That's what I get for doing your dirty work. Without fee. Mutch had to know some time, hadn't he?

MURRAY: Oh, never mind Sid's two-bob in. We're thirsty. Here Myrtle . . . (*He flings down a note.*) Don't worry with the cards. It was my turn, anyway. What'll you have?

MUTCH: Same as usual. I say, Myrt, where's this Frank Durham?

MYRTLE: Outside. As far as I know.

MUTCH (*sarcastic*): Where he's likely to stop!

MURRAY: He hasn't got enough guts to make a pearler.

SID (*sardonic*): Got to get guts to gut an oyster to get pearls. Simple.

MURRAY: You're right, Captain. Guts, that's the secret!

MYRTLE: Frank's got plenty. What if his luck is bad? (*Warming up.*) What if he won't buy pearls snide or steal another chap's divers? What if he's white—and plays the game clean?

MUTCH: So—Sid was right!

MYRTLE (*with a defiant toss of her head*): Yes, Captain. Sid was right. I am going to marry Frank.

MUTCH (*simply roaring*): Ha-ha-ha. Thirty bob a week offered for Myrtle to play Missus.

MYRTLE (*going white*): His luck'll change.

[*At this moment BILL, smart in tussore suit, and PAT in white, enter from the street. Fling topees down beside MUTCH's on the table. The older men continue to drink and talk at the back of the bar.*]

PAT: Hello, darlint.

BILL: Day, Myrt. 'Struth, it's hot. I want a long 'un. Not too much collar on it, either.

PAT: Same here. Me tongue's hanging out f'the dhrip av ut.

BILL: I say, Myrt, guess who's dropped anchor in the creek?

PAT: Surre, and 'twas no less than himself.

MYRTLE (*turning hastily from her job*): What's that? (*Recollecting herself*) Surre, an' is it the Divil himself you'll be maning, Pat, me bhoy?

BILL (*laughing*): Go on. You can't kid us. You know very well who Pat means. Young Frank.

MYRTLE: Oh, Mr. Durham? Wonder what can have brought him in again so soon. He did mention he wasn't intending to come till next neaps.

PAT: Och, darlint, the poor bhoy has surre gone and got a daid diver.

MYRTLE (*shaken out of her studied indifference*): No! Oh, no—not *that*!

PAT (*shaking his head and exaggerating his brogue*): For shame, the bad luck an' all he's f'ever getting.

BILL: You shouldn't worry, Myrt. Maybe it's only his braces he's lost. Or his heart.

MYRTLE: Here's your drinks. Thanks. (*To BILL, as she takes a coin*) That's right. Bill, is Durham really in, or are you only pulling my leg?

BILL: Never be so indelicate. You bet he's in. He'll be here in two ticks, never fear. With the usual bad-luck sob story.

PAT: Och! the poor bhoy. . . . All ready f'you t'dhry his tears on the best handkie. Have y'got ut ready, darlint?

BILL: There! What did I tell you?

[DURHAM *rushes in. He has come straight from his lugger, in salt-stained khaki shorts, singlet torn in holes, dirty sandshoes, battered topee. He's a fine-looking young man, dark, nervous, thin: an ascetic type. He is wildly excited.*

DURHAM (*centre stage*): Hullo. Hullo, everybody. Gather round, you chaps. Hullo, Sid. I say, Myrtle. . . . Myrtle, where are you? (*BILL and PAT shift so MYRTLE and DURHAM face each other across the bar.*) Cheers, Myrtle. . . . Come on. All of you. My shout for the crowd. Myrtle, see what I've got!

[*Triumphantly he planks a pearl-shell down on the counter in front of the girl. A huge blister stands up on it, catching the light. DURHAM's excited voice and the general stir awaken RUBENSTEIN, who sits up.*

DURHAM: How's that? How's that for something worth while? Ever seen one to equal it?

[*He asks the whole company, already simmering with excitement and crowding round to see, saying, "Let's see!" "My God!" "Give us a look."*]

RUBENSTEIN (*jumping up*): Ow's zis? Wot ees 'appen? 'Ave somebody feeshed anozzer Souzzen Cross?

BILL: Nothing but a bloody blister!

MURRAY: But what a blister!

PAT: 'Struth, it's a balloon!

RUBENSTEIN (*pushing in*): Let me see. Let me see. Pleeese. . .

MUTCH (*acquiring the shell and hanging on to it*): She's a beauty, Frank.

MURRAY: She certainly is, Captain.

DURHAM: I'll say so. Myrtle, you never make a mistake; you swore my luck'd change.

[*They smile at each other, a lovers' smile, for a second unconscious of the crowd.*]

MUTCH (*noticing and butting in*): What'll you take for her, Frank?

DURHAM (*dragging his attention from MYRTLE's smiling eyes*): I'm not selling, thank you. (*He turns to her again.*) Fizz for the crowd, Myrtle. A magnum.

MYRTLE (*alight*): Oh, Frank, I'm glad! (*She turns to her job.*)

RUBENSTEIN (*almost wresting shell from MUTCH. To DURHAM*): Deed you say you vere not selling ze bleester, monsieur?

DURHAM: The blister? Oh. Yes—that's what I said. Why? Are you thinking of making an offer?

RUBENSTEIN (*shaking his head*): Ah non. Non. Me, I nevaire buy ze pig in ze ointment or ze *perle* in ze bleester zat may be nozzing but a dirty mess of mud.

BILL (*to general laughter*): That's the spirit which lost Waterloo.

MUTCH (*swaggering*): I'll give you eight hundred for her, Frank.



DURHAM (*jeering*): Eight hundred? Nothing doing! My dear fellow, I'm collecting thousands on this. The pearl inside the blister will be a seventy-grainer. You just see. Good God, have I hogged it all these years for a pittance? I'm collecting, I tell you—and getting out! (*He addresses the crowd, excitement rising in him.*) Getting out. Out of this hell-house. (*He turns to the wine and glasses ready on the bar.*) Tick it up on the slate, Myrtle. And fill 'em up. Here, Mutch. Here, Murray. Here, you. (*The wine goes round.*) Myrtle, where's your own glass? (*She shakes her head.*) Oh, but yes. Yes, I say. This is where you drink too.

[MYRTLE gives in.

MURRAY: Well, Durham, here's the best of luck.

[*They all lift their glasses and drink, saying:*

“ Good luck, Durham.” “ To you ” . . . etc.

MYRTLE (*smiling at DURHAM*): May your luck change no more, Frank.

DURHAM (*lifting his glass*): To the seventy-grainer!

MURRAY: Well, if you ask me, I think you should take Mutch's offer and sell unbored.

SID (*getting slightly slurred in his speech*): Better he shold unbored than bored and shold.

MURRAY: Much wiser. It's not as if you're secure.

DURHAM (*aggressively*): That's not your business. To hell with security. This is my passport out. (*He looks round for the shell, which RUBENSTEIN has, and waves his hand at it.*) Back to the Old Country. Back to life.

SID (*sneering and shaky*): Country house parshies. Huntin'. Shootin'. And top hats. . . .

DURHAM (*heated*): That's all very well. But thank God I've not forgotten how to shave—yet.

SID: Nurshery knowledge: an English shentleman always has hish bath every morning: under fire or oncesh aboard the lugger.

DURHAM: Exactly. Until the day comes when he ceases to be a man, and becomes a sot.

[SID starts a rush at DURHAM. Stops short. Sways a little. Lifts his glass to throw at DURHAM, but sees the remaining liquor. He swallows it at a gulp and hurls the empty glass at DURHAM's feet. Before the other men can move, he turns and reels across to the little table, slumping into a chair and dropping his head on his hands.]

MUTCH (*reefing pants*): Forget it, Durham. No rough house here. Tell you what—if you won't sell, will you share? It's a helluva gamble. But I'll stake you four hundred. No pearl, you collect the cash. A gem, and we split the profits.

[MYRTLE comes round from behind the bar with a little dust-pan and broom to sweep up the broken glass. She goes down on one knee between MUTCH and DURHAM, who face each other centre stage.]

DURHAM: No. She's all mine.

MUTCH (*getting annoyed as he looks down at the stooping girl*): I'll lay you a bet then, young fool. A pony to a monkey that she proves a dud.

DURHAM: Done. She's no dud.

[As MYRTLE rises, their eyes lock again. DURHAM puts out a hand and runs his fingers up her arm as she passes back behind the bar. He lifts the counter for her.]

MURRAY (*to RUBENSTEIN*): Well, Ruby, what have you got to say. You're very silent.

RUBENSTEIN (*who during this time has taken the shell over to the window and studied the blister*): 'Ow can I say? Ze inside of a bleester, monsieur, eet ees even more uncertain zan ze 'eart of a voomans. . . .

MURRAY: Well, I reckon I'd like to lay a bet, too. An even fiver that there's no gem. Take me on, Ruby?

RUBENSTEIN: No. No. Nevaire. . . .

PAT: Take you on, Bill. I'll back the gem.

BILL: Good-oh. Ten-bob touch does me, though.

PAT: Surre.

[The men carry on these conversations more or less simultaneously, talking, handing the shell round, pointing out this and that to each other.]

MYRTLE (*leaning over the bar*): Frank. Frank. Come here a minute.

DURHAM (*leaving the group betting in the centre of the room and crossing to MYRTLE*): Yes.

MYRTLE (*in a low voice*): Wouldn't it be—wiser—to sell the blister outright to Captain Mutch?

DURHAM (*with a short laugh*): Penny-wiser. My God, Myrtle, think of the chance this gives *us*.

MYRTLE: I am thinking.

MUTCH: Hey, you there, you're not going to keep us in suspense cooling our heels whilst you mutter sweet nothings, are you? Come on round to Ah Chi's.

MURRAY: Let's all go round.

CHORUS OF: Yes. Yes. Let's go. Now. Come on, Frank.

MYRTLE (*urgently*): Oh, Frank. Don't do it! Please.

FRANK (*leaving her*): I'll do it.

MYRTLE (*addressing the crowd*): Then let it happen here! Please, gentlemen, let me in on the finish. . . . Let me see. I couldn't stand not seeing. Mr. Murray, don't leave me out! Why not fetch Ah Chi round here? Captain Mutch, Chi will come round here for you—he'll come here if *you* ask him. . . .

MUTCH (*measuring glances with MYRTLE*): Interested, eh?

MYRTLE: Well, who wouldn't be?

MUTCH (*sneering*): Quite so.

MURRAY: All right, Myrtle, we'll fetch Chi round.

BILL: Too right we will. Can't leave our Myrt out of the bet of the day.

MUTCH (*impatiently*): Come on, then. Come on.

MURRAY: Come and fetch Chi, Durham.

[*They go out in a crowd, jostling and calling to DURHAM to come. He crosses the room to the street door, past KEELER still crouched at the table, who has ignored the general excitement over the bet.*]

MYRTLE (*leaning right across the bar*): Frank——

DURHAM (*in answer to calls from outside and MUTCH coming back to the door to call him*): Go along, you chaps. Go along. Bring the old chow back with you. I'll be here. I won't run away.

MYRTLE: Sid. Sid Keeler.

SID: Yes.

MYRTLE: You go with the crowd, Sid. Chi can be difficult. You go—you're persuasive. . . .

SID (*smiling bitterly and glancing from one to the other*): Diplomatic, eh? All right, my dear, I'll leave you alone with him. (*He stands and shambles to the door.*) Durham (*he turns*) I'm—er—I'm afraid I spoke out of my turn. . . .

DURHAM: Oh, that's nothing. Forget it.

[SID goes out. MYRTLE comes round from behind the bar. DURHAM turns to help her lift the counter, but she already has it up and slips through. He tries to catch her in his arms, but she fends off kisses.]

MYRTLE: Look, Frank. This is serious.

DURHAM: Of course it is. Kiss me.

MYRTLE: No. No. Listen. I think you should sell the blister to Mutch. What if it is only—full of mud?

DURHAM: But it won't be.

MYRTLE: You can't tell. Nobody can. Eight hundred pounds. . . . Darling, we could get married!

DURHAM: And stop here? Why, I owe as much as that already. We'd just go on getting into debt in the same old way, scraping and struggling until we learned to hate each other as much as I hate——

MYRTLE (*interrupting*): Frank, Frank, you've never said before you felt this way. . . .

FRANK: No. I've bottled it up. What was the good of whining? But now—now I'm through with the place! Finished. Out. God, if you could guess how I felt about it, you'd not talk of selling to Mutch.

MYRTLE: But if—if—there is no pearl?

DURHAM (*bursting out*): Don't keep on with your damned ifs. . . . I tell you I've got to take the chance, Myrtle. (*He walks up and down, very agitated.*) My whole life—our whole life—depends on this. How is it that you aren't game to take a chance, too? (*He comes back to her side and takes her hands.*) Sweetheart, I have always thought you are the gamest woman I have ever known. . . .

MYRTLE: I couldn't stand it if—if—there was no pearl. You'd be so disappointed that—— Oh, I just don't know what you mightn't do!

DURHAM (*laughing*): I'll get shickered. That's a promise. My dear, when I think that at last I'll be able to make up just a little for all that you've done for me, all that you've given me—hope—courage to go on—in this hell. . . .

MYRTLE (*desperately, tearing away from him and turning her back*): No. No. Don't talk like that.

DURHAM: I must. Remember that day down on the fore-shore? I was done, that day. The heat, the misery, the lost faith. . . . But you pulled me out. I was getting like Keeler. If it hadn't been for you, Myrtle, I'd be like Keeler—now.

MYRTLE: I won't have you say such things. They're not true.

DURHAM: You're far too worldly-wise, my dear, not to know they're true. . . . But now, now, when we get this pearl, we can go away from here. For ever. Make another life, a good wholesome clean life. I'll show you England.

MYRTLE (*coming back to his side*): Must you—go back there?

DURHAM: Must? (*He laughs.*) There's no compulsion. But what else would I want to do? Oh, Myrtle, if you knew how I have dreamed of England.

MYRTLE (*a little hard*): And of the huntin' and the shootin' and—and the top hats?

DURHAM (*with a little embarrassed laugh*): Well, yes, sometimes. It's the life I'm accustomed to, my dear.

MYRTLE: The life I'm accustomed to is—this.

DURHAM (*happily*): You'll soon forget it.



MYRTLE: You've not forgotten England.

DURHAM: Well, who could? (*MYRTLE walks away from him*). But *this* can be forgotten. It will soon seem to you as if it has never even existed.

MYRTLE (*half to herself*): Huntin'. Shootin'. Top hats. And the women!

DURHAM: What's that?

MYRTLE: Nothing.

DURHAM: Say round four thousand pounds. . . . I'm reckoning on that. We'll get a good start, with that.

MYRTLE (*coming back to his side*): Frank. We could start—for sure—on eight hundred.

DURHAM: Yes. Start on the same old round. Debts. No pearls. More debts. I won't do it. I tell you, Myrtle, I simply loathe the life. . . . Besides, there's you to consider. You'd lose here every time: you'd wilt and grow tired—no pretty frocks, no sprees, no fun. . . .

MYRTLE: I'd have you. And a home.

DURHAM: Home? *Here?* (*He laughs.*) Darling, I can see you looking lovely in my real home—talking to my mother—

MYRTLE (*grimly*): So can I.

DURHAM (*still laughing*): Oh, the mater's a sport! You needn't feel worried. Heavens, the old girl still rides to hounds. At sixty! Myrtle, darling, what *is* the matter? Why aren't *you* game to be a sport too—to take a chance?

[SID KEELER *appears at the door, coughs and slips in.*

SID: I say, they're coming back, you two.

DURHAM: I can't make Myrtle out, Keeler. She's gone cold on this.

SID: When a man marries outside, he repents at Home.

[*MYRTLE glances at him.*

DURHAM: My dear, this is *our* life. . . . Surely you're game enough to take a chance with me?

MYRTLE (*centre, tossing her head back*): Yes. I reckon it *is* our life, Frank. I'll take the chance. . . .

DURHAM: Cheers and cheers. . . .

[DURHAM rushes to the bar, fills two glasses from whisky bottle and water and holds one out to MYRTLE.

DURHAM: That's the spirit! To us, darling! Oh, Sid. Drink to our pearl, Sid?

MYRTLE: Champagne and whisky don't mix, Frank.

DURHAM: Who cares? To us——

[He waves glass and drinks, but MYRTLE does not.

SID (helping himself generously): Well, here's happiness (significantly) for Myrtle.

[MYRTLE looks at SID a little piteously, mutters thanks, and suddenly tosses off the drink. Then she runs round behind the counter, passing a hand over her eyes.

MYRTLE: Money, please, Mr. Durham.

DURHAM: Tick it up.

[MUTCH and the others appear at the door.

MUTCH: Here we are. Come on, Chi. Come along.

[AH CHI is a little fat Chinaman, dressed in a white singlet and khaki pants, very clean. He is polite and self-assured.

MURRAY: Now, Durham, don't keep us in suspense.

DURHAM: Hi, where's the shell?

RUBENSTEIN: Maybe I 'ave stole it, monsieur. You ees not ver' careful——

DURHAM (laughing): Have you got it, Ruby?

RUBENSTEIN: Me, I see ver' well you are occupied—I put her under ze hat. . . .

[He produces shell from beneath topees on small table.

DURHAM (receiving shell and handing it to CHI): Well, Chi, here's your job. Produce me a pearl from that.

BILL: Fetch the table.

AH CHI (who has been examining shell): By Cli, this one gland-farder blister, orri'.

*[The table is brought forwards and placed centre front as far as possible. CHI is given a chair, the others crowd round, but CHI is seen producing from his pocket a tiny punch and very small hammer. He sits down and commences chipping at the shell. The men jostle round, saying: "Go it, Chi." "No slips now." "Let's see." "There's money on this, Chi."]*

DURHAM: Make room for Myrtle, please.

*[In a minute there is dead silence, except for the little chip, chip, of CHI's tools. It is a tense silence. The operation is not visible as the men crowd round the Chinaman. Then suddenly backs straighten. There is a huge concerted sigh.]*

CHI: Aah . . . My Cli, Mis' Durham, you vellee lucky man. This one more better than any pearl I see for long time. This one bobby-dazzler.

*[There is a little stir, the men make remarks according to their bets. DURHAM says nothing but holds out his hand to CHI. The pearl is placed in his palm. Silence falls as they watch him examine it. Without a word he shows it to MYRTLE, who glances and turns suddenly aside.]*

MUTCH (grimly): Well, you've certainly caught her this time, Frank.

PAT: Surre and it's the size of a marble itself . . . and that's ten bob in me pocket f'faith, me bhoy (to BILL).

MURRAY: I've not seen a stone like it for ten years. It's round. It's a stringer !

RUBENSTEIN (dancing with excitement): For me. For me. 'And eet 'ere to me, monsieur.

*[DURHAM gives the pearl to RUBENSTEIN. There is a buzz of talk, all speaking together. Some thump DURHAM on the back with congratulations.]*

DURHAM (his voice coolly rising above the babble): Thanks. Oh, thanks awfully. Yes, marvellous luck. But I knew it. Thanks, old man. Myrtle—where are you, Myrtle? I think another magnum, don't you?

*[MYRTLE, who has been silently standing, turns to go. DURHAM grips her wrist.]*

And oh, I say, just a moment. Come here, my dear. You chaps, I want to introduce you to—my future wife.

MYRTLE (*pulling away*): Don't you gentlemen take any notice of what he says. He's mixed his drinks.

DURHAM: What's this you're saying?

MYRTLE (*steadily*): Forget it, Frank. That's all. Forget the hot-air you've talked to me—across the bar.

DURHAM: Hot-air? Myrtle, you are going to marry me!

MYRTLE: Oh, no, Mr. Durham. Your mistake. I am not going to tie myself up with you—or anybody else. Me for a free life—and a merry one. It's just too bad—but I don't happen to fancy England.

DURHAM (*bewildered*): Myrtle, you said—you promised—Myrtle, you said you were willing to take a chance with me?

MYRTLE: Yes, I said so. And I did. You took one chance. I took another. But I'm taking no more.

DURHAM (*getting angry*): You can't mean this?

MYRTLE (*downright*): Too right I mean it.

DURHAM: Very well. Then I'll stay here.

MYRTLE: And live to curse me for keeping you? Oh, no, Frank Durham. You and I both gambled on that blister—but for different stakes. You for a pearl; me for a dud. You for Home and high life; me for here—and happiness! You won. I lost. That's all.

DURHAM: I'll stay here, I tell you.

MYRTLE: And drift back to thirty bob a week? And start watching me for fear I might chase a bit of fun? Oh, no. Home you'll go to your huntin' and your shootin' and—and the girls that go with 'em.

DURHAM (*distracted*): Not here, Myrtle. Please. Let's talk——

MYRTLE: Here's as good as any other place.

DURHAM (*getting angry again*): If that's how you feel——

MYRTLE: I do. (*Sarcastically*.) And probably I *should* want a bit of fun, anyhow.

DURHAM (*very cold and contained*): Very well.

MURRAY: Come, come, you two. It seems to me——

MYRTLE (*interrupting loudly*): Captain Mutch?

MUTCH: Want me?

MYRTLE: Yes. Is there a good picture-show on to-night, Captain?

DURHAM (*suddenly seeing red*): All right—go to Hell! We'll get to Hell out of here, too. Come on, chaps, another little drink won't do us any harm. But not in this hole.

RUBENSTEIN (*who has been all the time examining pearl*): Ah, but—ze *perle*, monsieur.

DURHAM: Oh, yes. The pearl.

RUBENSTEIN: I vill make you ze offaire. Ze ver' good offaire. But you mus' not show 'er too much, monsieur, or she lose 'er value. You mus' not forget, monsieur, zat ze *perle* of great price ees like ze Turkish bride: she mus' not be seen unteel she ees bought. . . .

DURHAM: What's your offer?

RUBENSTEIN: Ah, but first I mus' weigh 'er on ze scales in my office. . . .

DURHAM: Come on, then. Come on, chaps. And I'll buy you another round. After Ruby's bought the pearl.

[*He goes out, first glancing from the gem in his hand to MYRTLE. She meets his gaze with a little toss of the head and deliberately turns her back. It can be seen that she is biting her lip. DURHAM goes out, followed by the others. SID and MUTCH remain.*]

MUTCH: The poor mutt. Good for you, Myrtle. (*Reefing his pants complacently.*) He's the sort that'll soon be back on thirty bob a week, wherever he fetches up! All the same, I must see what Ruby gives for that stone. It's cost me a monkey. . . . (*He gets close to MYRTLE and grabs her elbow.*) I say, Myrt, how about it? Do we eat at my bungalow to-night—after the show?

MYRTLE (*indifferently*): What you say goes, Captain.

MUTCH: And I say supper. Same as usual. . . . So long.

[*He reefs his pants and swaggers out, tilting his topee straight as he goes. A small silence.*]



SID (*to the air*) : Well. Can you beat it ! And I thought I had nothing left to learn about women. (*Silence. No bites from MYRTLE, so SID adds:*) And yet she said—she said—she loved him !

MYRTLE (*centre stage, hands on hips, head tossed back, drawling*) : Oh, yeah ? (*Pause.*) Maybe some day, Sid Keeler, you'll have to give up thinking—and learn—what loving means ! (*Suddenly furious and overwrought*) Now, get out ! D'you hear me ? Get out. For God's sake, go !

[SID glances at her white set face, her pointing hand, shrugs his shoulders and shambles off. MYRTLE walks round behind the bar and begins to tidy up. Quite suddenly she brushes the damp hair from her forehead and drops her head on her arms, down amongst the empty bottles and dirty wine-glasses.]

SLOW CURTAIN

Alexander Ramsay

COERCION

*A Play*

## CHARACTERS

JOHN MORLEY – farmer and ex-officer in the C.E.F.  
SUSAN MORLEY – his mother  
MIKE GROGAN – a labour leader  
LOIS GARDNER – a school-teacher

SCENE: *The living-room of the MORLEY farm. It is roughly furnished and hints at a past devoted to pioneering. The tables, chairs, etc., are plain and the decorations consist of a few cheap pictures and some of the less crude calendars.*

*There is a door, back centre, which opens on to a storm porch. There are windows on each side of the door and just to the right of it is a bench with a basin and water bucket. On the door is a roller towel. To the left is a door leading to the kitchen which remains open throughout the play, revealing the light beyond. To the right is a door leading to the rest of the house and on its right is a rough dresser. The table, forward and rather left of centre is partly laid for supper. There is a rocker chair and a small table right front, leaving a good space between it and the table, which should be rectangular and at least six feet long. There is a rather ornate stove in the left back corner.*

SUSAN MORLEY, a grey old woman in a grey print dress, with apron, is discovered laying the table. She pauses, looking at table, goes to right hand window, lifts the curtain and peers out into the darkness. The wind is howling intermittently. She turns away shuddering and looks near-sightedly at the clock, shaking her head. Goes out to kitchen and returns with a cake. She stands for a moment contemplating table, smiles, and suddenly decides to set another place at right end of table. She fetches another chair and makes the third place ready.

*There is a sound of stamping and scuffling in the porch. SUSAN looks round expectantly. LOIS enters. She is not more than twenty-five; very smart and up to date. She is wearing a red dress and an expensive-looking fur coat. She is a beauty and well aware of it.*

LOIS (from doorway): Not late, am I, Mrs. Morley?

SUSAN: Why no, Lois. It's only half past five . . . or a few minutes over.

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The play is published by Messrs. Samuel French (Canada), Ltd., at 35 cents (1s. 6d. net).

LOIS (*crossing to stove and pulling off her mitts*): 'There's a storm coming up and it's going to be a cold night. (*She undoes her coat.*) It's lovely and warm in here though !

SUSAN: It's been getting colder all afternoon, so I've kept a good fire in the stove. Harry and Tom'll be cold when they get in.

LOIS: Are they away ?

[*She pulls a newspaper out of her pocket and begins to look at it.*

SUSAN: Yes, they're over hauling hay from the school section on " 28." I didn't want them to go ; but they were set on getting all the hay home before John gets back . . . I've had a feeling all day that there's something in the air.

LOIS (*looking up from the paper*): Bad weather ?

SUSAN: I suppose that was it. A storm brewing does make you feel as if there was something hanging over your head.

LOIS (*interested*): A sort of premonition of disaster ! It's funny, I've had a queer feeling, too. (*She notices the third place.*) Hullo ! Company for supper ?

SUSAN: I just had a notion that John might be home to-night.

LOIS (*with sudden animation*): Oh, do you really think so ? Did any word come ?

SUSAN (*smiling to herself*): No . . . no. Just a notion I had, that's all.

LOIS (*disappointed*): I'll go and get my things off. (*As she passes SUSAN she puts the paper on the table.*) Look what the paper says. Mr. Freyne left it at the school house on his way back from town.

[*She crosses to door right, and goes out.*

SUSAN (*she wipes her glasses and fumbles with the paper, then goes to rocker and sits down. She looks at the paper for a minute and then reads out loud with increasing agitation*): Communist rising ! (*LOIS enters, right, and stands behind SUSAN, smoothing down her dress and patting her hair.*) Troops refuse to fire on rioters ! . . . Transport workers cease work ! . . . No trains from the east ! . . . Premier and President in conference on



new financial crisis. . . . Rumour that Banks refuse to co-operate ! . . . A pretty state things are in ! Such times !  
(*She looks about her uneasily.*) I do wish John were home.

LOIS (*coming down to her right hand*): Quite exciting, isn't it, Mrs. Morley ?

SUSAN (*starts*): Oh ! . . . I didn't hear you. Exciting you call it ? Like the latest movie ! I think it's terrible. The whole world seems to be going mad.

LOIS: But it is exciting, wonderfully exciting. (*She crosses to stove and lights a cigarette.*) It's the birth of a new age. (*She blows a cloud of smoke across the room.*) Of course, it's going to be painful.

SUSAN: Someone's been filling your head up with that communist nonsense. The birth of a new age, indeed ! It's wickedness to say such things. I can't think what's come over young folks nowadays.

LOIS: We're beginning to think for ourselves, that's all ; instead of believing all the stupid old lies they try to teach us in . . .

SUSAN (*interrupting her*): You're all brain-sick with these new-fangled red notions ; that's what's the matter with you. The old beliefs that your fathers and mothers were brought up in aren't good enough for you. My John's about the only young man hereabouts that's kept his head.

LOIS (*in astonishment*): Why, Mrs. Morley ! (*She laughs in derision.*) It's John who's been explaining all about capitalism and socialism to me. (*SUSAN gasps and stares at her incredulously. LOIS crosses to her.*) All I know about the new, wonderful age that's coming—all I hope for—I've learnt from him.

SUSAN (*turning angrily away*): John ? Stuff and nonsense ! I don't believe a word of it ! (*She rises and bustles out to the kitchen. LOIS, with a toss of her head, walks back to window, right. SUSAN hurries back with teapot.*) John, red ? My John ! (*She goes out again and LOIS goes to chair and picks up paper. SUSAN re-enters.*) John's a safe man, like his father was. John, red ! The idea ! (*She goes out again and back at once with another dish.*) Well, . . . let's have supper. (*She sits down at left end of table.*) Whatever happens, we've got to eat.

LOIS (*comes to table and sits facing front*): If we're lucky.

SUSAN: If we're lucky. What do you mean?

LOIS: John said, before he went out, that we were provisioned to stand a siege.

SUSAN (*relieved*): Oh, . . . he only meant that we were fixed up for the Winter.

LOIS (*without looking up*): Perhaps!

SUSAN (*she puts down her knife and fork and speaks rather slowly and with some resentment*): Lois! What made you send John out on that prospecting foolishness?

LOIS (*pertly*): Me? I didn't send him out. How could I?

SUSAN (*sternly*): None of that, young woman! You're not dealing with a man now. Why did you do it? John doesn't need gold. He's well enough fixed here as it is.

LOIS (*contemptuously*): You wouldn't understand.

SUSAN: And why not? I'm a woman, too, and mostly we understand one another . . . too well for some.

LOIS: . . . and I'm not sure that I could explain.

SUSAN: Humph!

LOIS: I'm afraid John's not hard enough.

SUSAN: Not hard enough?

LOIS (*passionately*): No! He's too good-natured! People think he's easy. Can't you understand? Can't you see what's in front of us? Can't you realize that only the strong men, the hard, ruthless men, are going to come through?

SUSAN: Come through what?

LOIS: Why the years that are ahead of us: Years of chaos . . . and bloodshed, starvation, anarchy: Years when might will be right and the weak will be trampled underfoot.

SUSAN: You're frightened, girl! That's what's the matter with you. (*Scornfully*) It wouldn't have done for us women to be scared so easy when we first come here. How do you think the men would have managed, what with bad white men and the Indians going on the warpath, if they hadn't known that their women folk had the guts to handle a rifle, aye, and use it too, if need be? Many's the time we were

left alone while the men were out hunting. Mother taught me how to load and pass a gun before I was ten years old.

LOIS: I knew you wouldn't understand ! You think I'm a coward ! (*She laughs in the old woman's face.*) Can't you see that our civilization is breaking ? . . . that in the days that are coming a man—a woman too, for that matter—is going to be measured by a different standard ? The rules won't be the same.

SUSAN: John's no weakling ! Back in '14, when war broke out, he was only a lad, but he enlisted right away, and when it was over he walked in here one day Major Morley, with the Distinguished Service Order and the Military Cross !

LOIS: He won't have the discipline of the British Empire behind him this time.

SUSAN: You're thinking John isn't man enough to hold you, eh ?

LOIS: Against one . . . two . . . three . . . a dozen, yes ! He'd die protecting me ! (*Fiercely*) I want a mate who'll live . . . and fight his way through . . . and have sons like him.

SUSAN (*getting a glimmering of her meaning*): A sire for your children.

LOIS (*eagerly*): Yes, . . . yes ! It's a race instinct. It's a woman's duty to see that the race—her race—carries on. You know how the French and German women did their bit during the war, don't you ? I know lots of girls who feel as I do.

SUSAN (*bitterly*): You think John won't breed stark enough sons, so you sent him out prospecting to get him out of the way. (*Lois makes a gesture of disgust and impatience.*) Who's it to be next ? That agitator from Canweller with his loud mouth and his flashy car who's been taking you to parties lately ?

LOIS (*she turns away and looks up at the ceiling with a mischievous smile*): There are five hundred miners at Canweller, and Mike Grogan's their master ! (*Turns to SUSAN.*) He won't go under ! He's strong . . . and ruthless.

SUSAN: Mike Grogan, indeed ! His father's name was Stefan Grochuk. He's strong ! He's a crook and a coward . . .

[The back door opens suddenly and JOHN MORLEY appears in the doorway. In appearance he is tall and broad-shouldered, but lean. He is extremely restrained and reticent—the type of man who gives no warning of his intentions—whose anger is the more deadly for being cold and reasoned. His courage is above question; but he never gives away a trick.

He is wearing a grey sweater, khaki breeches, long boots and a sheepskin coat. SUSAN breaks off in the middle of her diatribe on seeing him, and rises.

JOHN: Hullo, folks !

SUSAN: Well, John, my dear !

[She starts toward him.

LOIS (she swings round in her chair as SUSAN speaks): John !

[She also rises and starts toward him, but holds back, giving SUSAN the stage.

SUSAN (she crosses to JOHN who is still standing near the door): You're just in time for supper. (JOHN kisses her, looking over her shoulder at LOIS.) Get your coat off and come and sit in. See, I laid a place for you. I had a hunch you'd be in to-night.

JOHN (releasing her): Right-o, mother ! (He moves toward LOIS, who, after a second's hesitation, comes to meet him with extended hands.) And how's the girl ? Prettier than ever, eh ?

LOIS (eagerly): What luck, John ?

[His face falls and he drops his hands to his sides and half turns away.

JOHN: Luck ? Oh, lots of luck.

LOIS: You found gold ?

JOHN (half laughing): Didn't I say I would ?

SUSAN (from her seat at the table): Come and get your supper, you two. It's getting cold. John can tell us all about his find while we're eating.

JOHN: All right, Mother.

[He hurries off right. LOIS watches him with a smile.

SUSAN: There ! You see ! He's done it ! What are you going to do now ?



LOIS (*she is still facing the door*): I . . . don't . . . know.

[*She turns and walks to her place, thinking hard.*]

JOHN (*he enters right, crosses to LOIS and drops a poke of gold dust beside her plate*): There's a sample for you.

[*He goes to basin; pours out some water and begins to wash his hands.*]

SUSAN (*whose attention is divided between her son and the poke*): There's hot water on the kitchen stove, John.

JOHN: I haven't washed in warm water for two months, . . . and Lois Creek . . . —of course I called my El Dorado after you—is just glacier water, and I've been up to my elbows in it ever since I struck pay dirt a month ago.

LOIS (*with some gold dust in the palm of her hand*): Is there much of this, John?

[*He is drying his hands.*]

JOHN (*gravely*): Enough . . .

[*SUSAN interrupts. She is rather impatient with LOIS.*]

SUSAN: I'll go and get you some warm tea, John.

[*She goes out.*]

JOHN (*continuing*): Enough to give me a great deal of power. (*Then speaking almost roughly*) That's what you want, isn't it?

[*He turns right and is about to step round his chair.*]

LOIS (*rises and follows him*): I wanted it for you, John. (*He turns and faces her and she puts a hand on his arm.*) You do see, don't you?

JOHN (*takes hold of her and looks intently into her eyes*): I . . . think . . . so. I win, do I?

LOIS: Yes. You win, John . . . if you still want me.

JOHN: I always want you! (*He takes her in his arms and kisses her. Suddenly she flings her arms round his neck and responds passionately to his embrace.*) You're mine now, do you understand?

LOIS: I always have been yours.

JOHN: Then why . . .



LOIS: John, I had to be sure, . . . for the children's sake. You must see! Just love won't take us through the years to come. Courage isn't enough! John . . . John! I love you so, and I was so afraid.

JOHN: I understand. You wanted someone who could do things, eh? You wanted to love with your head as well as your heart?

LOIS: John, . . . could you be hard, if you had to, . . . ruthless? (*She breaks away from him.*) Could you . . . could you . . . kill?

[*He takes a sudden step up to her, grasps her by the shoulders and turns her roughly toward himself.*]

LOIS (*shrinking*): When you look like that you make me think of a tiger.

JOHN (*with a grim laugh*): Why not a lion?

LOIS: They say a tiger strikes without warning.

[*A loud knock is heard at the door as SUSAN enters briskly with teapot. She halts and for a second they all stare at the door as if frozen, then JOHN strides to it and flings it open. MIKE GROGAN is seen standing in the doorway. He is a big, coarse-looking man, rather flashily dressed and wearing a fur coat which increases his bulk.*]

JOHN: Hullo, Mike! Come on in.

MIKE (*surprised at seeing JOHN*): Hullo, John! I thought you was out prospectin'.

[*He enters.*]

JOHN: I'm just back. Supper's all ready.

MIKE: Evenin', Mrs. Morley. Evenin', Lois.

LOIS: Hullo, Mike,

SUSAN (*with an effort*): Will you take your coat off, Mr. Grogan, . . . and sit in? I'll make some fresh tea.

MIKE (*taking off his coat*): Thanks, Mrs. Morley. I kinda figured I could count on you for a handout. It must be all of ten miles from town, and a drive in this cold sure makes a man hungry. (*JOHN takes his coat.*) Thanks, John. (*With a shade of contempt in his voice*) Any luck in yer prospectin'?

JOHN: Not too bad. I think I've staked a good placer claim. (*He points to poke on the table.*) Look at that!

MIKE (*he picks up the poke, weighs it in his hand and examines the contents. He starts a guttural chuckle*): Well, well !

[*He looks from JOHN to LOIS and back, replaces the poke carefully on the table.*

SUSAN (*she indicates her seat*): Sit here, Mr. Grogan. I've finished my supper. John's only just beginning.

MIKE: Thank you, Mrs. Morley.

[*He walks round and takes her seat. SUSAN pours out his tea and retires to the kitchen. MIKE helps himself and then looks up at JOHN.*

MIKE: Now that's what I call real tough luck.

[*He is still chuckling.*

JOHN: Tough luck ! What do you mean ?

MIKE: Well . . . you go out and stake what looks like a real bonanza—coarse gold an' all—. . . and the very day you get back the whole bloody world repudiates gold.

JOHN and LOIS: What ?

MIKE: It's a fact ! (*He pulls a telegram out of his pocket and smooths it out on the table.*) Here it is. Listen to this ! (*Reads*) National News Agency. [Date.] Premier and President in conference with leaders of the National Reform Party, following the lead of Europe, decide to abandon gold . . . as a medium of exchange. There you are !

[*JOHN's first reaction is one of disgusted amazement. He looks quickly at LOIS but her eyes are fixed on her plate. By the time MIKE has returned the telegram to his pocket he has himself under control.*

JOHN (*he leans back in his chair and laughs*): Well—it had to come sometime.

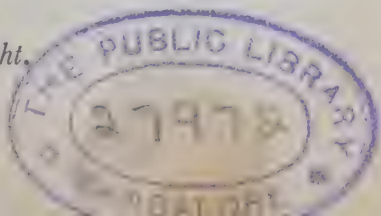
LOIS (*surprised and deeply hurt*): Don't you care ?

JOHN: Not a tinker's damn.

LOIS (*she jumps to her feet*): Oh, how can you—how can you be so——

JOHN (*watching her keenly; interrupts*): Never mind ! It won't make any real difference.

[*LOIS walks over to window right.*



MIKE (*with his mouth full*): Nah, it won't make no reel difference. (JOHN and LOIS both turn and stare at him. He continues in a new tone, rasping and full of bluster) See here, folks! (SUSAN re-enters, and, as he continues, stands staring at him.) What I reely come out here for—was to get Lois. (JOHN starts slightly and seems about to speak; but as MIKE goes on his face sets and with his chin in the palm of his right hand, elbow on the table, he watches MIKE. LOIS and SUSAN stand absolutely motionless with their eyes fixed on JOHN.) Yer see, the boys has elected me boss, and I figured I'd like to have her where I could look after her myself. D'yer get me? (SUSAN is about to take a step forward and speak but LOIS bars the way with her arm. She realizes the danger of the situation and is watching JOHN with intense excitement.) Things may get a bit rough, yer know; in fact it's hard to tell what may happen if the boys should get reely out of hand.

JOHN (*in a cold, even voice*): Just what has happened—so far?

LOIS: Yes. What has happened?

MIKE: We had to take charge of the city to-day. We tried to do things peaceable (*he leers at JOHN*); but some of the bulls got mean, so we gave 'em the works. They got it worse in most of the big cities. There's only about a half-dozen on the whole continent where the workers ain't in charge to-night— And that's why it didn't make no reel difference about the gold!

JOHN: Go on!

MIKE: I wouldn't stand for no rough stuff. "Hands off the women" I said; but of course some of the boys were bound to get a bit fresh—at first. I'll have 'em where they belong in a day or two.

JOHN: What actually happened?

MIKE: Some of the boys were hungry, and they just naturally took what they wanted—food and drink.

JOHN: Drink, eh?

MIKE: Lots of 'em hadn't tasted hard liquor for years.

JOHN: What next?

MIKE: There's some liquidating got to be done.

JOHN and LOIS: Liquidating?

MIKE: Yeah. The soviets taught us how to deal with intelligents and bourgeois.

JOHN: Yes?

MIKE: They just liquidated them, so they wouldn't be able to stir up no trouble afterwards.

JOHN: Who, in particular, are you going to liquidate?

MIKE (*ticking them off on his fingers*): Well, the mayor, the chief bull, two of them mouthy preachers, and the police court judge—damn him—went on the spot this morning.

JOHN: You killed them, eh?

[*His left hand, hanging by his side, is the only indicator of his feelings.*]

MIKE: Sure I did! (*He pulls a small automatic out of his coat pocket and lays it in the palm of his left hand, extended.*) That little toy grew five notches just before dinner. I wouldn't trust that job to no one else. They might weaken. See here! It's like the attacks you vets tell about. After the first wave of soldiers had gone over the German front line, along come the moppin' up parties and bumped off any Huns the first bunch had missed—so there wouldn't be no shootin' in the back after they'd gone on. We're the first wave and the moppin' up party both, see! And I don't figure on leavin' no trouble behind ME. I'm goin' to make a clean-up!

JOHN (*unable altogether to conceal his disgust*): You're going to what?

MIKE: Make a clean-up! (*In a bullying tone*) You're not going soft, are yer? No sissy boys for me! I know how to deal with them.

JOHN (*smiling grimly*): No, I'm not going soft. I'm like an egg in boiling water, getting harder every minute.

MIKE: Eh, what's that? (*Laughs.*) Oh, yeah. A hard egg, eh? Guts of iron! That's what we want.

JOHN: How many high-brows have you got on your liquidating list?

MIKE: A few over the hundred—for a start. (*Leering at JOHN*) Some of their women are goin' ter need a man to look after them. Chance fer you to grab off a nice little piece.



[JOHN catches LOIS's eye.

LOIS: How did the women come off to-day?

MIKE: There was a few gals got handled a bit roughly.  
(To JOHN) If yer know what I mean.

JOHN: I know what you mean.

MIKE: You been a soldier an' seen things, eh? You know how 'tis?

JOHN: I know—— What are you going to do now?

MIKE: I figured I'd let the boys have a run for a few days, and then put the brakes on gradual.

JOHN: What about the women?

MIKE: Aw, if they act sensible they won't get reely hurt—not like those did to-day. It's too bad they died.

SUSAN: They died?

JOHN: I suppose you couldn't keep the boys in hand?

MIKE: Oh, I guess I could; but 'twouldn't pay to be too strict with 'em at first. What's it matter, anyway? Some of them dolled-up janes has got it comin' to them.

JOHN (*looking him straight in the eye and speaking slowly and sternly*): I suppose it wouldn't do to give some of the high-brows a chance—let them live and watch them?

MIKE: What's the sense in riskin' the success of the Revolution just to give a trouble-maker a chance? Nah! Kill 'im, I say, like you would a snake; or, maybe, he'll—kill—YOU.

[*He pulls some paper out of his pocket and starts making notes of some more victims.*

JOHN (*rises*): Accused! Found guilty and sentenced to death!

MIKE (*without looking up*): Sure! Just like that!

JOHN: I'm glad to hear you say that. It simplifies things—a lot.

MIKE (*looks up and stares at JOHN doubtfully. LOIS comes forward and is about to pick up the automatic. MIKE snatches it up*): No yer don't! (*Grins.*) That's my gat! You leave it alone.

LOIS: I just wanted to look at it. You needn't get excited.

[*She turns away with a meaning glance to JOHN.*



MIKE: Who's excited? (*He laughs.*) A rod like that ain't no gal's plaything. It might go off.

LOIS (*innocently*): Is it loaded?

MIKE: I'll say it is!

LOIS: Then you'd better unload it. It's bad manners to come into a friend's house with a loaded gun.

MIKE (*amused. He rocks back in his chair and looks up at her*): Is that so? See here, gal; I ain't lookin' for no lessons in manners from you—not yet.

LOIS: What's the matter with you? Are you scared to come in here unarmed?

MIKE: Not so you'd notice I ain't.

[*He goes on with his notes.*]

JOHN: We don't mind a loaded gun. Most of us will be toting one for some time to come, by the look of things.

LOIS (*she looks down at MIKE*): Any thug can tote a gun.

[*JOHN strolls away right, thinking. He wheels suddenly as if about to attack MIKE. A look of joy comes over LOIS's face. JOHN sees his mother watching him and halts about three paces from table.*]

MIKE (*looks up*): Oh, say, John! The vets are meeting to-night and I gotta be there. You'd better come along with me. We'll have them in hand in a few minutes.

[*Goes on with his notes.*]

JOHN (*grimly*): I shall be there.

MIKE (*glancing at LOIS*): Lois! Get yourself ready and we'll be on our way. There's no time to waste.

JOHN (*as she moves a pace toward right, quietly*): Lois!

LOIS: Yes, John.

JOHN: Are you going with him?

[*MIKE glances up with a grin. LOIS crosses to right and stops in front of JOHN, looks into his eyes for a moment with all the "allure" of which she is capable; but does not answer; then she goes out right. JOHN watches her go and when he turns back his mind is made up. SUSAN, watching him, sees something new. She would rather MIKE took LOIS than that JOHN endangered himself.*]

SUSAN (*warningly*): John.

JOHN (*cheerfully*): Yes, Mother.

MIKE (*he has put away his notes and risen. He comes round the table with outstretched hand*): Be a sport and wish me luck.

JOHN (*turning away*): No ! I'm afraid I can't do that—quite.

MIKE (*with a jeering laugh*): Well, your bad luck is my good luck. It 'ud have been you if you'd been in my place. Women are all alike. (*He turns away with a swagger.*) The boss wins—every time.

SUSAN (*across the table*): That's a lie, a dirty lie !

MIKE (*looks at her in amazement*): E-e-H ?

JOHN: Yes ? I wonder how much we really understand about them. (*MIKE turns and looks at him uneasily, puzzled by something in his voice.*) I think we'd better go outside and—smoke.

[*He goes to door and holds it open. MIKE is puzzled. He glances round quickly; then his face sets in an evil sneer and he pats the pocket where his gun rests.*

MIKE: Hell, yes ! If you say so.

[*He turns and swaggers out of door, back. JOHN follows and shuts the door behind him.*

SUSAN (*watches them go out; then goes to table and picks up poke. She is turning it over in her hands when LOIS enters. She has made no change in her dress*): You shameless huzzy !

LOIS (*looking toward door*): Hush ! (*Hurriedly*) I'm not going with him ! Look ! I'm not dressed !

SUSAN: You——

LOIS (*imperiously*): Hush ! (*They both stand in strained attitudes with their attention fixed on the door. A loud coughing grunt is heard, followed by a heavy fall.*) Listen !

[*Two heavy blows from without.*

SUSAN: My son ! (*A pause.*)

LOIS: He's all right.

[*She is not quite sure. A long pause; then footsteps and JOHN enters. Both the women relax.*

JOHN (*he turns toward basin*): Mother, get me my gunbelt ! Lois, hurry up and get ready. You'll have to manage the women.

SUSAN (*creeping toward him*): John ! John ! What's that on your hands ?

JOHN (*washing*): Blood !

SUSAN (*in a voice of horror*): Blood ! (*She goes off left, returning instantly with belt.*) Blood, John ?

LOIS (*standing by door right. The strain has been almost too much for her and she speaks in a voice vibrating with impatience and emotion*): Yes ! Can't you understand ? He couldn't risk letting him live ! He had to kill him !

JOHN: Hurry up and get ready, Lois, there's a good girl.

[*She goes.*

SUSAN: You killed him, John ?

JOHN: Yes, Mother.

SUSAN: Why, my son ?

[JOHN takes the gunbelt from her and buckles it on in silence. LOIS enters dressed as he puts on his coat. Then he turns to his mother and puts a hand on each of her shoulders. Speaking comfortably to her.

JOHN: Tom and Harry have just pulled in with their loads. They'll look after you till we get back.

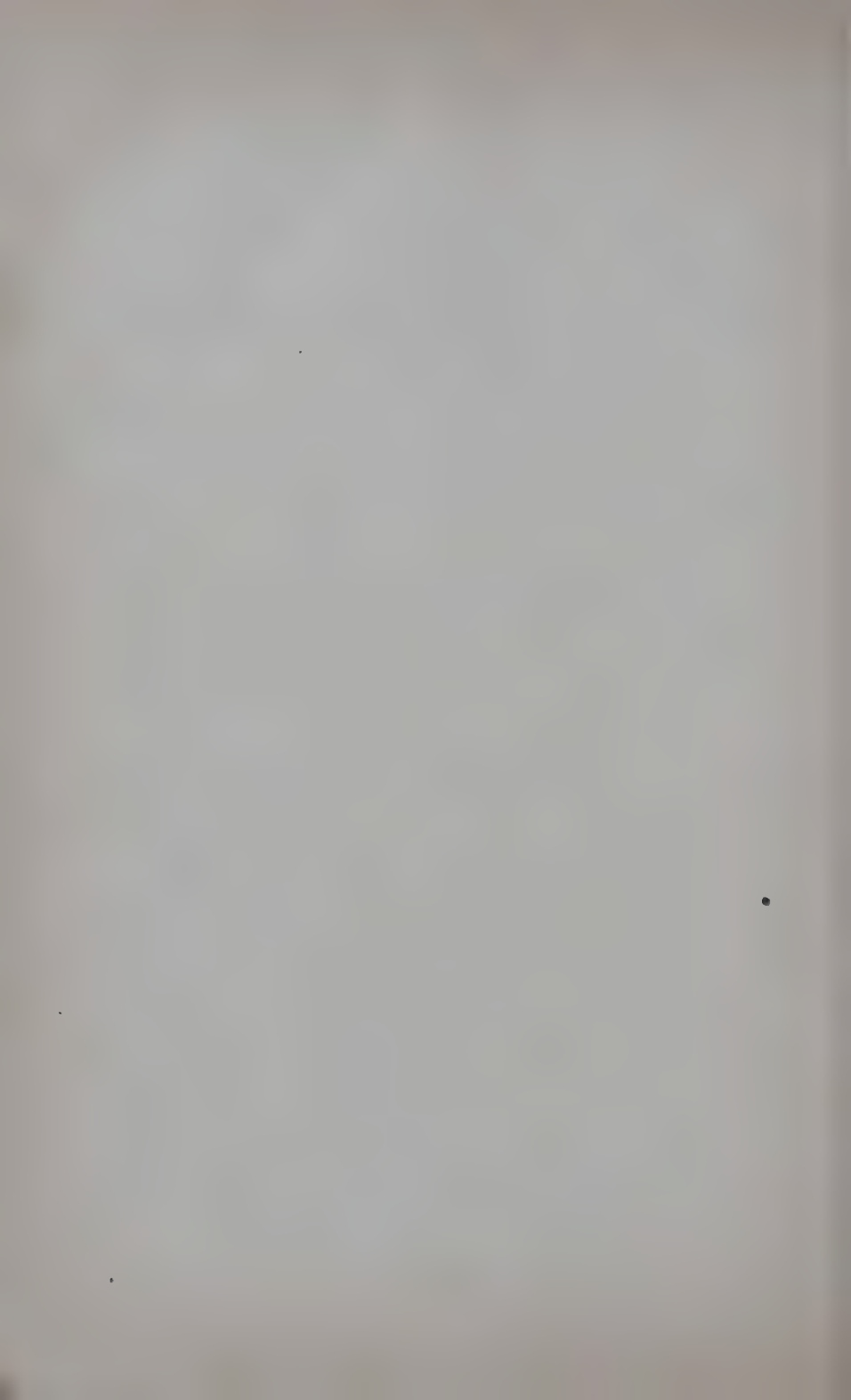
SUSAN: Where are you going, John ?

JOHN: I'm going to the vet's meeting first, and then to a mass meeting.

SUSAN: They'll kill you, my son. He was their leader.

JOHN (*with a half laugh*): Like hell they will ! (*Then with intense earnestness, his voice increasing in depth and violence as he speaks*) They followed me at school ! They followed me in France ! By God ! they'll follow me now !

[*He takes LOIS's arm and leads her out—the girl looking back pityingly at the old woman who watches them go. When the sound of footsteps has died away, she glances at the poke in her hands and then comes slowly toward her chair, groping blindly for support. She reaches it and grasps the back with her left hand; then looking upward with an expression of bleak bewilderment she lets the poke slip slowly through her fingers to the ground, spilling the gold dust as it falls.*



Sir Rabindranath Tagore

CHITRA

*A Lyrical Drama in Nine Scenes*



## CHARACTERS

### GODS :

MADANA (Eros)

VASANTA (Lycoris)

### MORTALS :

CHITRA – daughter of the King of Manipur

ARJUNA – a prince of the house of the Kurus. He is of the Kshatriya or “warrior” caste, and during the action is living as a hermit in the forest

VILLAGERS from an outlying district of Manipur

The drama is based on a story in the *Mahabharata*.

It has been performed in India without scenery, the actors being surrounded by the audience. Proposals for its production elsewhere have been made to the author, and stage directions have been provided and will be supplied on application. A curtain setting can be used.

## SCENE I

CHITRA: Art thou the god of the five darts, the Lord of Love?

MADANA: I am he who was the first born in the heart of the Creator. I bind in bonds of pain and bliss the lives of men and women!

CHITRA: I know, I know what that pain is and those bonds.—And what art thou, my lord?

VASANTA: I am his friend—Vasanta—the King of the Seasons. Death and decrepitude would wear the world to the bone but that I follow them and constantly attack them. I am Eternal Youth.

CHITRA: I bow to thee, Lord Vasanta.

MADANA: But what stern vow is thine, fair stranger? Why dost thou wither thy fresh youth with penance and mortification? Such a sacrifice is not fit for the worship of love. Who art thou and what is thy prayer?

CHITRA: I am Chitra, the daughter of the kingly house of Manipur. With godlike grace Lord Shiva promised to my royal grandsire an unbroken line of male descent. Nevertheless, the divine word proved powerless to change the spark of life in my mother's womb—so invincible was my nature, woman though I be.

MADANA: I know, that is why thy father brings thee up as his son. He has taught thee the use of the bow and all the duties of a king.

CHITRA: Yes, that is why I am dressed in man's attire and have left the seclusion of a woman's chamber. I know no feminine wiles for winning hearts. My hands are strong to bend the bow, but I have never learnt Cupid's archery, the play of eyes.

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All applications for permission to perform this play must be made to Messrs. Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2; *or*, for South Africa, to Messrs. Samuel French, Ltd., P.O. Box 497, Nairobi; *or*, for Canada, to Messrs. Samuel French (Canada), Ltd., 480 University Avenue, Toronto; *or*, for the U.S.A., to Messrs. Samuel French, Inc., 25 West 45th Street, New York City, *or* 811 West 7th Street, Los Angeles.

MADANA: That requires no schooling, fair one. The eye does its work untaught, and he knows how well, who is struck to the heart.

CHITRA: One day in search of game I roved alone to the forest on the bank of the Purna river. Tying my horse to a tree-trunk I entered a dense thicket on the track of a deer. I found a narrow sinuous path meandering through the dusk of the entangled boughs, the foliage vibrated with the chirping of crickets, when of a sudden I came upon a man lying on a bed of dried leaves, across my path. I asked him haughtily to move aside, but he heeded not. Then with the sharp end of my bow I pricked him in contempt. Instantly he leapt up with straight, tall limbs, like a sudden tongue of fire from a heap of ashes. An amused smile flickered round the corners of his mouth, perhaps at the sight of my boyish countenance. Then for the first time in my life I felt myself a woman, and knew that a man was before me.

MADANA: At the auspicious hour I teach the man and the woman this supreme lesson to know themselves. What happened after that?

CHITRA: With fear and wonder I asked him, "Who are you?" "I am Arjuna," he said, "of the great Kuru clan." I stood petrified like a statue, and forgot to do him obeisance. Was this indeed Arjuna, the one great idol of my dreams? Yes, I had long ago heard how he had vowed a twelve-years' celibacy. Many a day my young ambition had spurred me on to break my lance with him, to challenge him in disguise to single combat, and prove my skill in arms against him. Ah, foolish heart, whither fled thy presumption? Could I but exchange my youth with all its aspirations for the clod of earth under his feet, I should deem it a most precious grace. I know not in what whirlpool of thought I was lost, when suddenly I saw him vanish through the forest. O foolish woman, neither didst thou greet him, nor speak a word, nor beg forgiveness, but stoodest like a barbarian boor while he contemptuously walked away! . . . Next morning I laid aside my man's clothing, I donned bracelets, anklets, waist-chain, and a gown of purple-red silk. The unaccustomed dress clung

about my shrinking shame; but I hastened on my quest, and found Arjuna in the forest temple of Shiva.

MADANA: Tell me the story to the end. I am the heart-born god, and I understand the mystery of these impulses.

CHITRA: Only vaguely can I remember what things I said, and what answer I got. Do not ask me to tell you all. Shame fell on me like a thunderbolt, yet could not break me to pieces, so like a man am I. His last words as I walked home pricked my ears like red-hot needles. "I have taken the vow of celibacy. I am not fit to be thy husband!" Oh, the vow of a man! Surely thou knowest, thou god of love, that unnumbered saints and sages have surrendered the merits of their lifelong penance at the feet of a woman. I broke my bow in two and burnt my arrows in the fire. I hated my strong, little arm, scored by drawing the bow-string. O Love, god Love, thou hast laid low in the dust the vain pride of my manlike strength; and all my man's training lies crushed under my feet. Now teach me thy lessons; give me the power of the weak and the weapon of the unarmed hand.

MADANA: I will be thy friend. I will bring the world-conquering Arjuna a captive before thee, to accept his rebellion's sentence at thy hand.

CHITRA: Had I but the time needed, I could win his heart by slow degrees, and ask no help of the gods. I would stand by his side as a comrade, drive the fierce horses of his war-chariot, attend him in the pleasures of the chase, keep guard at night at the entrance of his tent, and help him in all the great duties of a Kshatriya, rescuing the weak, and meting out justice where it is due. Surely at last the day would have come for him to look at me and wonder, "What boy is this? Has one of my slaves in a former life followed me like my good deeds into this?" I am not the woman who nourishes her despair in lonely silence, feeding it with nightly tears and covering it with the daily patient smile, a widow from her birth. The flower of my desire shall never drop into the dust before it has ripened to fruit. But it is the labour of a lifetime to make one's true self known and honoured. Therefore I have come to thy door, thou world-vanquishing Love, and thou,

Vasanta, youthful Lord of the Seasons, take from my young body this primal injustice, an unattractive plainness. For a single day make me superbly beautiful, even as beautiful as was the sudden blooming of love in my heart. Give me but one brief day of perfect beauty, and I will answer for the days that follow.

MADANA: Lady, I grant thy prayer.

VASANTA: Not for the short span of a day, but for one whole year, the charm of spring blossoms shall nestle round thy limbs.

## SCENE II

ARJUNA: Was I dreaming or was what I saw by the lake truly there? Sitting on the mossy turf, I mused over bygone years in the sloping shadows of the evening, when slowly there came out from the folding darkness of foliage an apparition of beauty in the perfect form of a woman, and stood on a white slab of stone at the water's brink. It seemed that the heart of the earth must heave in joy under her bare white feet. Methought the vague veilings of her body should melt in ecstasy into air as the golden mist of dawn melts from off the snowy peak of the eastern hill. She bowed herself above the shining mirror of the lake and saw the reflection of her face. She started up in awe and stood still; then smiled, and with a careless sweep of her left arm unloosed her hair and let it trail on the earth at her feet. She bared her bosom and looked at her arms, so flawlessly modelled, and instinct with an exquisite caress. Bending her head she saw the sweet blossoming of her youth and the tender bloom and blush of her skin. She beamed with a glad surprise. So if the white lotus-bud on opening her eyes in the morning were to arch her neck and see her shadow in the water, would she wonder at herself the livelong day. But a moment after the smile passed from her face and a shade of sadness crept into her eyes. She bound up her tresses, drew her veil over her arms, and sighing slowly, walked away like a beauteous evening fading into the night. To me the supreme fulfilment of desire seemed to have been revealed in a flash and then to have vanished. . . . But who is it pushes the door?

[*Enter CHITRA, dressed as a woman.*]



Ah ! it is she ! Quiet, my heart !

Fear me not, lady ! I am a Kshatriya.

CHITRA : Honoured sir, you are my guest. I live in this temple. I know not in what way I can show you hospitality.

ARJUNA : Fair lady, the very sight of you is indeed the highest hospitality. If you will not take it amiss, I would ask you a question.

CHITRA : You have permission.

ARJUNA : What stern vow keeps you immured in this solitary temple, depriving all mortals of a vision of so much loveliness ?

CHITRA : I harbour a secret desire in my heart, for the fulfilment of which I offer daily prayers to Lord Shiva.

ARJUNA : Alas, what can you desire, you who are the desire of the whole world ? From the easternmost hill on whose summit the morning sun first prints his fiery foot to the end of the sunset land have I travelled. I have seen whatever is most precious, beautiful and great on the earth. My knowledge shall be yours, only say for what or for whom you seek.

CHITRA : He whom I seek is known to all.

ARJUNA : Indeed ! Who may this favourite of the gods be, whose fame has captured your heart ?

CHITRA : Sprung from the highest of all royal houses, the greatest of all heroes is he.

ARJUNA : Lady, offer not such wealth of beauty as is yours on the altar of false reputation. Spurious fame spreads from tongue to tongue like the fog of the early dawn before the sun rises. Tell me who in the highest of kingly lines is the supreme hero ?

CHITRA : Hermit, you are jealous of other men's fame. Do you not know that all over the world the royal house of the Kurus is the most famous ?

ARJUNA : The house of the Kurus ?

CHITRA : And have you never heard of the greatest name of that far-famed house ?

ARJUNA : From your own lips let me hear it.

CHITRA: Arjuna, the conqueror of the world. I have culled from the mouths of the multitude that imperishable name and hidden it with care in my maiden heart. Hermit, why do you look perturbed? Has that name only a deceitful glitter? Say so, and I will not hesitate to break this casket of my heart and throw the false gem to the dust.

ARJUNA: Be his name and fame, his bravery and prowess false or true, for mercy's sake do not banish him from your heart—for he kneels at your feet even now.

CHITRA: You, Arjuna!

ARJUNA: Yes, I am he, the love-hungered guest at your door.

CHITRA: Then it is not true that Arjuna has taken a vow of chastity for twelve long years?

ARJUNA: But you have dissolved my vow even as the moon dissolves the night's vow of obscurity.

CHITRA: Oh, shame upon you! What have you seen in me that makes you false to yourself? Whom do you seek in these dark eyes, these milk-white arms, if you are ready to pay for her the price of your probity? Not my true self, I know. Surely this cannot be love, this is not man's highest homage to woman. Alas, that this frail disguise, the body, should make one blind to the light of the deathless spirit! Yes, now indeed I know, Arjuna, the fame of your heroic manhood is false.

ARJUNA: Ah, I feel how vain is fame, the pride of prowess! Everything seems to me a dream. You alone are perfect; you are the wealth of the world, the end of all poverty, the goal of all efforts, the one woman! Others there are who can be but slowly known, while to see you for a moment is to see perfect completeness now and for ever.

CHITRA: Alas, it is not I, not I, Arjuna! It is the deceit of a god. Go, go, my hero, go! Woo not falsehood, offer not your great heart to an illusion. Go!

### SCENE III

CHITRA: No, 'tis impossible! To face that fervent gaze that almost grasps you like clutching hands of the hungry spirit within; to feel his heart struggling to break its bounds,

urging its passionate cry through the entire body--and then to send him away like a beggar--no, impossible !

[*Enter MADANA and VASANTA.*

Ah, god of love, what fearful flame is this with which thou hast enveloped me ? I burn, and I burn whatever I touch.

MADANA : I desire to know what happened last night.

CHITRA : At evening I lay down on a grassy bed strewn with the petals of spring flowers, and recollected the wonderful praise of my beauty I had heard from Arjuna—drinking drop by drop the honey that I had stored during the long day. The history of my past life like that of my former existences was forgotten. I felt like a flower, which has but a few fleeting hours to listen to all the humming flatteries and whispered murmurs of the woodlands and then must lower its eyes from the sky, bend its head and at a breath give itself up to the dust without a cry, thus ending the short story of a perfect moment that has neither past nor future.

VASANTA : A limitless life of glory can bloom and spend itself in a morning.

MADANA : Like an endless meaning in the narrow span of a song.

CHITRA : The southern breeze caressed me to sleep. From the flowering *Malati* bower overhead silent kisses dropped over my body. On my hair, my breast, my feet, each flower chose a bed to die on. I slept. And suddenly, in the depth of my sleep, I felt as if some intense eager look, like tapering fingers of flame, touched my slumbering body. I started up and saw the Hermit standing before me. The moon had moved to the west, peering through the leaves to espy this wonder of divine art wrought in a fragile human frame. The air was heavy with perfume : the silence of the night was vocal with the chirping of crickets ; the reflections of the trees hung motionless in the lake ; and with his staff in his hand he stood, tall and straight and still, like a forest tree. It seemed to me that I had, on opening my eyes, died to all realities of life and undergone a dream birth into a shadow land. Shame slipped to my feet like loosened clothes. I heard his call—"Beloved, my most beloved !" And all my forgotten lives united as

one and responded to it. I said, "Take me, take all I am!" And I stretched out my arms to him. The moon set behind the trees. One curtain of darkness covered all. Heaven and earth, time and space, pleasure and pain, death and life merged together in an unbearable ecstasy. . . . With the first gleam of light, the first twitter of birds, I rose up and sat leaning on my left arm. He lay asleep with a vague smile about his lips like the crescent moon in the morning. The rosy-red glow of the dawn fell upon his noble forehead. I sighed and stood up. I drew together the leafy lianas to screen the streaming sun from his face. I looked about me and saw the same old earth. I remembered what I used to be, and ran and ran like a deer afraid of her own shadow, through the forest path strewn with *shephali* flowers. I found a lonely nook, and sitting down covered my face with both hands, and tried to weep and cry. But no tears came to my eyes.

MADANA: Alas, thou daughter of mortals! I stole from the divine storehouse the fragrant wine of heaven, filled with it one earthly night to the brim, and placed it in thy hand to drink—yet still I hear this cry of anguish!

CHITRA (*bitterly*): Who drank it? The rarest completion of life's desire, the first union of love was proffered to me, but was wrested from my grasp! This borrowed beauty, this falsehood that enwraps me, will slip from me, taking with it the only monument of that sweet union, as the petals fall from an overblown flower: and the woman ashamed of her naked poverty will sit weeping day and night. Lord Love, this cursed appearance companions me like a demon robbing me of all the prizes of love—all the kisses for which my heart is athirst.

MADANA: Alas, how vain thy single night had been! The barque of joy came in sight, but the waves would not let it touch the shore.

CHITRA: Heaven came so close to my hand that I forgot for a moment that it had not reached me. But when I woke in the morning from my dream I found that my body had become my own rival. It is my hateful task to deck her every day, to send her to my beloved and see her caressed by him. O god, take back thy boon!



MADANA: But if I take it from you how can you stand before your lover? To snatch away the cup from his lips when he has scarcely drained his first draught of pleasure, would not that be cruel? With what resentful anger must he regard thee then?

CHITRA: That would be better far than this. I will reveal my true self to him, a nobler thing than this disguise. If he rejects it, if he spurns me and breaks my heart, I will bear even that in silence.

VASANTA: Listen to my advice. When with the advent of autumn the flowering season is over, then comes the triumph of fruitage. A time will come of itself when the heat-cloyed bloom of the body will droop and Arjuna will gladly accept the abiding fruitful truth in thee. O child, go back to thy mad festival.

#### SCENE IV

CHITRA: Why do you watch me like that, my warrior?

ARJUNA: I watch how you weave that garland. Skill and grace, the twin brother and sister, are dancing playfully on your finger-tips. I am watching and thinking.

CHITRA: What are you thinking, sir?

ARJUNA: I am thinking that you, with this same lightness of touch and sweetness, are weaving my days of exile into an immortal wreath, to crown me when I return home.

CHITRA: Home! But this love is not for a home!

ARJUNA: Not for a home?

CHITRA: No. Never talk of that. Take to your home what is abiding and strong. Leave the little wild flower where it was born; leave it beautifully to die at the day's end among all fading blossoms and decaying leaves. Do not take it to your palace hall to fling it on the stony floor which knows no pity for things that fade and are forgotten.

ARJUNA: Is ours that kind of love?

CHITRA: Yes, no other! Why regret it? That which was meant for idle days should never outlive them. Joy turns into pain when the door by which it should depart is shut against it. Take it and keep it as long as it lasts. Let not the satiety of your evening claim more than the desire of



your morning could earn. . . . The day is done. Put this garland on. I am tired. Take me in your arms, my love. Let all vain bickerings of discontent die away at the sweet meeting of our lips.

ARJUNA: Hush ! Listen, my beloved, the sound of prayer-bells from the distant village temple steals upon the evening air across the silent trees !

### SCENE V

VASANTA: I cannot keep pace with thee, my friend ! I am tired. It is a hard task to keep alive the fire thou hast kindled. Sleep overtakes me, and the fan drops from my hand, and cold ashes cover the glow of the fire. I start up again from my slumber and with all my might rescue the weary flame. But this can go on no longer.

MADANA: I know, thou art fickle as a child. Ever restless is thy play in heaven and on earth. Things that thou for days buildest up with endless detail thou dost shatter in a moment without regret. But this work of ours is nearly finished. Pleasure-winged days fly fast, and the year, almost at its end, swoons in rapturous bliss.

### SCENE VI

ARJUNA: I woke in the morning and found that my dreams had distilled a gem. I have no casket to inclose it, no king's crown whereon to fix it, no chain from which to hang it, and yet have not the heart to throw it away. My Kshatriya's right arm, idly occupied in holding it, forgets its desires.

[*Enter CHITRA.*]

CHITRA: Tell me your thoughts, sir !

ARJUNA: My mind is busy with thoughts of hunting to-day. See, how the rain pours in torrents and fiercely beats upon the hillside. The dark shadow of the clouds hangs heavily over the forest, and the swollen stream, like reckless youth, overleaps all barriers with mocking laughter. On such rainy days we five brothers would go to the Chitraka forest to

chase wild beasts. Those were glad times. Our hearts danced to the drumbeat of tumbling clouds. The woods resounded with the screams of peacocks. Timid deer could not hear our approaching steps nor the patter of rain and the noise of waterfalls; the leopards would leave their tracks on the wet earth, betraying their lairs. Our sport over, we dared each other to swim across turbulent streams on our way back home. The restless spirit is in me. I long to go hunting.

CHITRA: First run down the quarry you are now following. Are you quite certain that the enchanted deer you pursue must needs be caught? No, not yet. Like a dream the wild creature eludes you when it seems most nearly yours. Look how the wind is chased by the mad rain that discharges a thousand arrows after it. Yet it goes free and unconquered. Our sport is like that, my love! You give chase to the fleet-footed spirit of beauty, aiming at her every dart you have in your hands. Yet this magic deer runs ever free and untouched.

ARJUNA: My love, have you no home where kind hearts are waiting for your return? A home which you once made sweet with your gentle service and whose light went out when you left it for this wilderness?

CHITRA: Why these questions? Are the hours of unthinking pleasure over? Do you not know that I am no more than what you see before you? For me there is no vista beyond. The dew that hangs on the tip of a *kinsuka* petal has neither name nor destination. It offers no answer to any question. She whom you love is like that perfect bead of dew.

ARJUNA: Has she no tie with the world? Can she be merely like a fragment of heaven dropped on the earth through the carelessness of a wanton god?

CHITRA: Yes.

ARJUNA: Ah, that is why I always seem about to lose you. My heart is unsatisfied, my mind knows no peace. Come closer to me, unattainable one! Surrender yourself to the bonds of name and home and parentage. Let my heart feel you on all sides and live with you in the peaceful security of love.

CHITRA: Why this vain effort to catch and keep the tints of the clouds, the dance of the waves, the smell of the flowers?

ARJUNA: Mistress mine, do not hope to pacify love with airy nothings. Give me something to clasp, something that can last longer than pleasure, that can endure even through suffering.

CHITRA: Hero mine, the year is not yet full, and you are tired already! Now I know that it is Heaven's blessing that has made the flower's term of life short. Could this body of mine have drooped and died with the flowers of last spring it surely would have died with honour. Yet, its days are numbered, my love. Spare it not, press it dry of honey, for fear your beggar's heart come back to it again and again with unsated desire, like a thirsty bee when summer blossoms lie dead in the dust.

## SCENE VII

MADANA: To-night is thy last night.

VASANTA: The loveliness of your body will return to-morrow to the inexhaustible stores of the spring. The ruddy tint of thy lips freed from the memory of Arjuna's kisses, will bud anew as a pair of fresh *asoka* leaves, and the soft, white glow of thy skin will be born again in a hundred fragrant jasmine flowers.

CHITRA: O gods, grant me this prayer! To-night, in its last hour, let my beauty flash its brightest, like the final flicker of a dying flame.

MADANA: Thou shalt have thy wish.

## SCENE VIII

VILLAGERS: Who will protect us now?

ARJUNA: Why, by what danger are you threatened?

VILLAGERS: The robbers are pouring from the northern hills like a mountain flood to devastate our village.

ARJUNA: Have you in this kingdom no warden?

VILLAGERS: Princess Chitra was the terror of all evildoers. While she was in this happy land we feared natural deaths, but had no other fears. Now she has gone on a pilgrimage, and none knows where to find her.

ARJUNA: Is the warden of this country a woman?

VILLAGERS: Yes, she is our father and mother in one.

[*Exeunt VILLAGERS.*]

*Enter CHITRA.*

CHITRA: Why are you sitting all alone?

ARJUNA: I am trying to imagine what kind of woman Princess Chitra may be. I hear so many stories of her from all sorts of men.

CHITRA: Ah, but she is not beautiful. She has no such lovely eyes as mine, dark as death. She can pierce any target she will, but not our hero's heart.

ARJUNA: They say that in valour she is a man, and a woman in tenderness.

CHITRA: That, indeed, is her greatest misfortune. When a woman is merely a woman, when she winds herself round and round men's hearts with her smiles and sobs and services and caressing endearments; then she is happy. Of what use to her are learning and great achievements? Could you have seen her only yesterday in the court of the Lord Shiva's temple by the forest path, you would have passed by without deigning to look at her. But have you grown so weary of woman's beauty that you seek in her for a man's strength?

With green leaves wet from the spray of the foaming waterfall, I have made our noonday bed in a cavern dark as night. There the cool of the soft green mosses thick on the black and dripping stone kisses your eyes to sleep. Let me guide you thither.

ARJUNA: Not to-day, beloved.

CHITRA: Why not to-day?

ARJUNA: I have heard that a horde of robbers has neared the plains. Needs must I go and prepare my weapons to protect the frightened villagers.

CHITRA: You need have no fear for them. Before she started on her pilgrimage, Princess Chitra had set strong guards on all the frontier passes.

ARJUNA: Yet permit me for a short while to set about a Kshatriya's work. With new glory will I ennoble this idle arm, and make of it a pillow more worthy of your head.

CHITRA: What if I refuse to let you go, if I keep you entwined in my arms? Would you rudely snatch yourself free and leave me? Go then! But you must know that the liana, once broken in two, never joins again. Go, if your thirst is quenched. But, if not, then remember that the goddess of pleasure is fickle, and waits for no man. Sit for a while, my lord! Tell me what uneasy thoughts tease you. Who occupied your mind to-day? Is it Chitra?

ARJUNA: Yes, it is Chitra. I wonder in fulfilment of what vow she has gone on her pilgrimage. Of what could she stand in need?

CHITRA: Her needs? Why, what has she ever had, the unfortunate creature? Her very qualities are as prison walls, shutting her woman's heart in a bare cell. She is obscured, she is unfulfilled. Her womanly love must content itself dressed in rags; beauty is denied her. She is like the spirit of a cheerless morning, sitting upon the stony mountain peak, all her light blotted out by dark clouds. Do not ask me of her life. It will never sound sweet to man's ear.

ARJUNA: I am eager to learn all about her. I am like a traveller come to a strange city at midnight. Domes and towers and garden-trees look vague and shadowy, and the dull moan of the sea comes fitfully through the silence of sleep. Wistfully he waits for the morning to reveal to him all the strange wonders. Oh, tell me her story.

CHITRA: What more is there to tell?

ARJUNA: I seem to see her, in my mind's eye, riding on a white horse, proudly holding the reins in her left hand, and in her right a bow, and like the Goddess of Victory dispensing glad hope all round her. Like a watchful lioness she protects the litter at her dugs with a fierce love. Woman's arms, though adorned with naught but unfettered strength, are beautiful! My heart is restless, fair



one, like a serpent reviving from his long winter's sleep. Come, let us both race on swift horses side by side, like twin orbs of light sweeping through space. Out from this slumbrous prison of green gloom, this dank, dense cover of perfumed intoxication, choking breath.

CHITRA: Arjuna, tell me true, if, now at once, by some magic I could shake myself free from this voluptuous softness, this timid bloom of beauty shrinking from the rude and healthy touch of the world, and fling it from my body like borrowed clothes, would you be able to bear it? If I stand up straight and strong with the strength of a daring heart spurning the wiles and arts of twining weakness, if I hold my head high like a tall young mountain fir, no longer trailing in the dust like a liana, shall I appeal to man's eye? No, no, you could not endure it. It is better that I should keep spread about me all the dainty playthings of fugitive youth, and wait for you in patience. When it pleases you to return, I will smilingly pour out for you the wine of pleasure in the cup of this beauteous body. When you are tired and satiated with this wine, you can go to work or play; and when I grow old I will accept humbly and gratefully whatever corner is left for me. Would it please your heroic soul if the playmate of the night aspired to be the helpmeet of the day, if the left arm learnt to share the burden of the proud right arm?

ARJUNA: I never seem to know you aright. You seem to me like a goddess hidden within a golden image. I cannot touch you, I cannot pay you my dues in return for your priceless gifts. Thus my love is incomplete. Sometimes in the enigmatic depth of your sad look, in your playful words mocking at their own meaning, I gain glimpses of a being trying to rend asunder the languorous grace of her body, to emerge in a chaste fire of pain through a vaporous veil of smiles. Illusion is the first appearance of Truth. She advances toward her lover in disguise. But a time comes when she throws off her ornaments and veils and stands clothed in naked dignity. I grope for that ultimate *you*, that bare simplicity of truth.

Why these tears, my love? Why cover your face with your hands? Have I pained you, my darling? Forget what I said. I will be content with the present. Let each separate

moment of beauty come to me like a bird of mystery from its unseen nest bearing a message of music. Let me for ever sit with my hope on the brink of its realization, and thus end my days.

### SCENE IX

CHITRA (*cloaked*) : My lord, has the cup been drained to the last drop ? Is this, indeed, the end ? No, when all is done something still remains, and that is my last sacrifice at your feet.

I brought from the garden of heaven flowers of incomparable beauty with which to worship you, god of my heart. If the rites are over, if the flowers have faded, let me throw them out of the temple (*unveiling in her original male attire*). Now, look at your worshipper with gracious eyes.

I am not beautifully perfect as the flowers with which I worshipped. I have many flaws and blemishes. I am a traveller in the great world-path, my garments are dirty, and my feet are bleeding with thorns. Where should I achieve flower-beauty, the unsullied loveliness of a moment's life ? The gift that I proudly bring you is the heart of a woman. Here have all pains and joys gathered, the hopes and fears and shames of a daughter of the dust ; here love springs up struggling toward immortal life. Herein lies an imperfection which yet is noble and grand. If the flower-service is finished, my master, accept *this* as your servant for the days to come !

I am Chitra, the King's daughter. Perhaps you will remember the day when a woman came to you in the temple of Shiva, her body loaded with ornaments and finery. That shameless woman came to court you as though she were a man. You rejected her ; you did well. My lord, I am that woman. She was my disguise. Then by the boon of the gods I obtained for a year the most radiant form that a mortal ever wore, and wearied my hero's heart with the burden of that deceit. Most surely I am not that woman.

I am Chitra. No goddess to be worshipped, nor yet the object of common pity to be brushed aside like a moth

with indifference. If you deign to keep me by your side in the path of danger and daring, if you allow me to share the great duties of your life, then you will know my true self. If your babe, whom I am nourishing in my womb, be born a son, I shall myself teach him to be a second Arjuna, and send him to you when the time comes, and then at last you will truly know me. To-day I can only offer you Chitra, the daughter of a king.

ARJUNA: Beloved, my life is full !

CURTAIN



Marc Connelly

LITTLE DAVID ✓

*A Play*

AN UNPRODUCED SCENE FROM "THE GREEN PASTURES,"  
SUGGESTED BY ROARK BRADFORD'S "OL' MAN ADAM  
AN' HIS CHILLUN"



## CHARACTERS

DAVID

THE PROPHET SAMUEL

THE LORD

GOLIATH'S VOICE

CHOIR (*offstage*)

This little play may not be performed within the British Isles. The Censor bans it, because of its representation of THE LORD.

*Little David*, though it was originally a scene of *The Green Pastures*, was omitted by the author from the American production of that play, owing to "time" limitations on the stage. It was published for the first time in *Hearst's International Cosmopolitan* magazine (September, 1930) with the descriptive sub-title, "The Act which the Author Loved Most." It is now published by courtesy of the magazine and the author.

It need scarcely be said that the production should be simple and suggestive. Possibly the presence of the sheep and the wolf might be left entirely to the imagination.

SCENE: *It is a grassy glade. Mechanical sheep are grazing upstage. Sunlight dapples the scene through the trees.* DAVID, a little Negro boy, enters. He is barefooted and, besides his long switch, carries a homemade guitar. He seats himself on a rock.

DAVID: Hello, sheep an' lambs. Wanter hear little David sing?

[*The sheep look up.* DAVID begins to sing.

Oh, Joshua was de son of Nun.  
He never quit wukk to his wukk was done.  
Little David, play on yo' hawp,  
Hallelu, hallelu,  
Little David, play on yo' hawp,  
Hallelu.

[*During the next verse the approximation of a wolf appears over a rise in the background. The sheep scatter to the R. and L., but the wolf catches one and drags it out of sight.*

Ol' Noah he did build de Awk  
An' he built it out of poplar bawk.  
Little David, play on yo' hawp,  
Hallelu, hallelu,  
Little David, play on yo' hawp,  
Hal——

[*The song is broken by the bleating of the attacked sheep.* DAVID turns and sees the wolf disappearing. He jumps up.

Well, dog-gone dat ol' wolf. Dat's de fo'th sheep dis week he's taken. I gotter stop dat. I gotter figure some way to ruin dat wolf.

[*He sits, somewhat in the attitude of Rodin's "Penseur."*

I gotter invent somethin'.

[*He thinks for a moment; then smiles.*

I's invented it.

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This play may not be produced within the British Isles, owing to the Censor's ban.

In countries where this ban does not apply, permission must be obtained from the Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 6 East 39th Street, New York City.

*[He reaches to the ground and picks up a sling.]*

Dis'll do it. It's jest de right invention. C'm on back, sheep an' lambs. He ain't gonter hurt you no mo'.

*[The sheep timidly return.]*

Now you jest fool aroun' an' make out like things is goin' along jest as usual.

*[He resumes singing, but this time he does not play his guitar. He holds the sling in readiness, and warily watches for the approach of the wolf.]*

De Lawd picked out ol' Abraham,  
Wild as a lion, meek as a lamb.  
Little David, play on yo' hawp,  
Hallelu, hallelu,  
Little David, play on yo' hawp,  
Hallelu.

*[The wolf stealthily comes into sight again. DAVID senses his presence but continues to sing.]*

De Lawd got mad, set de world on fiah,  
Burned up Sol'mun an' Gomiah,  
Little David, play on yo' hawp,  
Hallelu, hallelu,  
Little David, play on yo' hawp,  
Halleeee—

*[The wolf is about to take another sheep. DAVID turns swiftly and casts the sling. The wolf leaps in the air and falls over the rise in the distance.]*

Wham ! Don't need be 'fraid now, lambs an' sheep.

*[He examines the sling. Then goes upstage to see the wolf.]*

Dat's a good invention. Who's dis comin' along ? Dog-gone, he looks like he's drunk.

*[THE PROPHET SAMUEL appears. He is an elderly Negro, greatly bewildered.]*

Why, it's Elder Samuel. What's de matter, Granddaddy Samuel ?

SAMUEL: Who's dat ? Why, it's little David. Oh, little David, de Lawd's pronounced a jedgment. I'm so out of my

mind, I've been tearin' across fields every whichaway, not knowin' where I was goin'.

DAVID: What's de Lawd done ?

SAMUEL: Ain't you been home lately, son ?

DAVID: I've been out yere fo' two weeks.

SAMUEL: David, de Philistines is captured us, an' yere we is goin' into bondage ag'in.

DAVID (*appalled*): Oh, no !

SAMUEL: Dey ain't no use talkin'. Dey's burnin' our cities right now.

DAVID: Is dey took our town yit ?

SAMUEL: Dey moved in dis mo'nin'.

DAVID: But my three brothers is dere, Granddaddy Samuel. Dey wouldn't *let* 'em take it !

SAMUEL: We's got de Lawd angry ag'in, little David, an' nobody kin stop 'em. Yo' three brothers was killed by deir head man jest a little bit ago.

DAVID: My brothers is de stoutest men in all de land of Canaan. What did dey do ? Take him on one at a time, wid deir han's tied ?

SAMUEL: He took de three of 'em on all to once wid *his* han's tied an' his feet shackled. He's so strong it looked like he jest breathed 'em down. It looks like de end of Israel, too, little David.

[SAMUEL *gazes offstage toward the ruined town.*]

DAVID: No. 'Count caize de Lawd loves us. I know dat, 'count caize he likes de songs I made up. He's tol' me so.

SAMUEL: Look, dere's our own little town burnin'. Dey's all giant men an' deir head man took it all by hisself.

DAVID (*simply*): I kin whup him. I got de means.

SAMUEL (*still looking away*): I knew we was offendin' de Lawd. I tried to make us stop. He give us dis pretty Land of Canaan, an' what have we done wid it ?

DAVID (*inspired*): I kin whup him. I got de means.

SAMUEL (*still inattentive*): An' now de Chosen People is abandoned. De deliverer was to come, but—— (*He turns slowly, puzzled*) What did you say, little David ?

DAVID (*his eyes on the sky above*): I kin whup him. I got de means.

[SAMUEL *stares, then goes to him.*

SAMUEL (*softly, in awe*): Wid what ?

DAVID (*showing the sling*): Wid dis.

SAMUEL: Little David !

[DAVID *slowly lowers his eyes and turns to SAMUEL.*

DAVID: What ?

SAMUEL: I believe you kin do it ! (*Excitedly*) Yes, suh. De way yo' standin' dere is jest de way I always pictured de Lawd's anointed. Fo' fo'ty years I been lookin' fo' him. *Dat's* why I went 'cross de fields dat crazy way ! I thought I was losin' my min'. But no, dat wuz de Lawd's wukk. Little David, he was leadin' me right yere to you all de time !

DAVID: De Lawd's on our side still.

SAMUEL (*almost shouting*): Co'se he is ! We gonter be saved ! Go git 'em, little David ! Thank you, Lawd, fo' lettin' me find him.

[SAMUEL *starts to leave.*

DAVID: Whar you goin', Granddaddy Samuel ?

SAMUEL: I'm gonter spread de news. I'm goin' to de temple an' den tell ol' King Saul what he wants to hear.

DAVID (*a little surprised*): You gonter tell him what I said ?

SAMUEL: I'm gonter tell all Israel dat de deliverer's been found. Dat it wasn't nobody on earth but little David. Dat it was little David all de time. An' now at las', he's took charge !

[SAMUEL *leaves. DAVID lowers his head.*

DAVID: Tell me what to do, Lawd.

[THE LORD *appears over the rise.*



THE LORD : Do what comes into yo' mind, David.

DAVID (*still in prayer*) : Yes, Lawd.

THE LORD : I was pretty near ready to give 'em up. But I'm gonter give 'em dis one las' chance, David, on 'count of you.

DAVID : Yes, Lawd.

THE LORD : I'm gonter make you de king. You is gonter be my sweet singer. But if dey break my laws ag'in I'm gonter abandon dem fo'ever. You be a good king, David, an' teach 'em dat.

DAVID : Yes, Lawd.

THE LORD : Yere comes ol' Goliath. He's de biggest man dey got. I 'spect he heard yo' defy. Give it to him, David. An' give it to him good.

[THE LORD *disappears*.

*From the other side of the stage come the legs of GOLIATH. That part of him above the knees is hidden from sight. He stops. DAVID picks up a stone and puts it in the sling.*

GOLIATH'S VOICE : Whar at's dat little boy dat's talkin' so big ?

DAVID : I'm him.

GOLIATH'S VOICE : You ? Why, you ain't no bigger dan a little bug.

DAVID : Mebbe so. Dat don't mean nothin' !

GOLIATH'S VOICE : It do when I jine de party. Does you know who I am ?

DAVID : Yo' ol' Goliath.

GOLIATH'S VOICE : Dat's it. An' I'm de biggest an' stoutest man in de worl' ! Me, I'm so strong dat toornadoes an' harricanes follow me 'roun' like little pet dogs. I spits lightnin' an' I breathes thunder, an' I'm de doom of Israel.

DAVID : Jest de same I take notice you got sweat on yo' fo'head.

GOLIATH'S VOICE : I jest walked through a cloud. Dat's only de wetness.

DAVID: Well, yerc's somethin' else fo' yo' fo'head.

*[He casts the sling.]*

GOLIATH'S VOICE: Now, what you gonter try to do, tease me? I 'spect I better jest bend over an' flick you down once an' fo'—— Oh!

*[The body of GOLIATH falls. That is, the legs topple over, the knees offstage, and the shoes of the late giant come up perpendicularly about the C. of the stage.]*

DAVID: Wham!

*[He goes to the feet. The sheep, which had run away at GOLIATH'S approach, reappear. DAVID inspects the fallen body, raising his hand to shade his eyes as he looks off at the distant head.]*

Right in de middle o' de fo'head!

*[He smiles, then picks up his guitar, and, resting his left elbow in the cup of GOLIATH'S downstage heel, begins to sing again.]*

Oh, David was a shepherd boy.

He killed Goliath an' hollered fo' joy.

Little David——

*[The CHOIR offstage joins in the singing and the sheep begin to dance.]*

—play on yo' hawp,

Hallelu, hallelu,

Little David, play on yo' hawp,

Hallelu!

THE SCENE ENDS

Theodore Dreiser  
LAUGHING GAS

*A Play*

## CHARACTERS

JASON JAMES VATABEEL — an eminent physician

FENWAY BAIL — a celebrated surgeon

ARTHUR GAILEY — house physician of the Michael Slade  
Memorial Hospital

SLEASON TUFTS — his assistant

FRANKLIN DRYDEN — an anæsthetist

NURSES and INTERNES of the Michael Slade Hospital

ALCEPHORAN — a power of physics

DEMYAPHON (nitrous oxide) — an element of chemistry

SHADOWS and VOICES of the first, second, third and fourth  
planes

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE

SCENE: *The operating-room of the Michael Slade Hospital, a glistening chamber of white porcelain and white tiles. Nickel operating table in the foreground. Racks of surgical implements and supplies to either side. A strong, even light from the north French windows. Attendants in white bustling about preparatory to an operation.*

*Enter FENWAY BAIL and JASON JAMES VATABEEL, his friend. They are followed by ARTHUR GAILEY, SLEASON TUFTS, and TWO NURSES.*

BAIL (*a cool, sallow-faced, collected man of perhaps fifty-five, wise and incisive*): Well, Jason, here you are, a victim of surgery after all !

VATABEEL (*tall, gaunt, quite fifty-eight, very distinguished, a little pale from recent suffering, a bandage about his neck, beginning to loosen his shirt in front*): The last time I took ether I had a very strange experience or dream, one of the best of the etheric variety, I fancy. I am wondering whether it will repeat itself to-day.

BAIL (*examining a case of instruments, and busy with asides to GAILEY and others*): I was thinking of using nitrous oxide, unless you would prefer ether. It seems to me a little too much for a minor operation. I doubt whether I shall be four or five minutes in all. Just as you say, however.

VATABEEL (*with a dry medical smile*): Far be it from me to demand ether. I dislike the stuff intensely.

[*He begins to take off his coat and waistcoat, and adjusts an aseptic apron.*]

BAIL (*to GAILEY*): I shall want a retractor, clamps and thumb forceps. Are all the different ligatures here ? Ah, yes, I see. (*To VATABEEL*) Now, Doctor, if you will just make yourself comfortable.

[*He indicates the operating table.*]

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Application for permission to perform this play must be made to Mr. Theodore Dreiser, c/o Messrs. Simon and Schuster, Inc., 386 Fourth Avenue, New York.

In its present form, this play is dedicated to the reading public only. A special acting version will be supplied by the author (address as above).



VATABEEL (*opening the neck of his undershirt and sitting down on the edge of the operating table*): I never imagined a small tumour could be so troublesome. (*To BAIL*) This is where Greek meets Greek, isn't it?

BAIL (*when GAILEY has unfastened the bandage around VATABEEL's neck, pressing the tumour lightly with his forefinger*): But not bearing gifts, unfortunately—at least, not pleasant ones. This seems to be doing very well; no inflammation.

VATABEEL (*stretching himself comfortably, with, however, a sense of impending disaster, or the possibility of it*): At least this is the end of my bother with it.

[*The gas tank is wheeled forward, the breathing cap adjusted.*]

THE ANÆSTHETIST (*taking his place at the doctor-patient's head*): Now, Doctor, if you please. We are only using one-fourth strength to begin with. And don't forget the forefinger.

VATABEEL (*beginning to inhale, and thinking of the mysteries of medicine and surgery and gases,—to himself*): Ah, yes, the forefinger. I must keep that going, or try to, until the gas overpowers me and I can no longer do it. When it drops of its own accord, they will know that I am unconscious. Marvellous progress medicine has made in these last few years! It hasn't been ten years since we had to administer ether and gas full strength because we didn't know how to dilute them. And there weren't any anæsthetists.

[*He begins to crook his finger.*]

THE ANÆSTHETIST (*one finger on VATABEEL's pulse, the other on the siphon regulator*): That's very nice, Doctor, excellent. Breathe very deeply, please—as deep as possible.

VATABEEL (*continuing his thoughts, but taking a deep full breath*): How self-contained and executive these young beginners are—just as I was in my day! Thus the control of the world passes from generation to generation.

[*His face and ears begin to tingle. The fumes of the gas reach his brain. A warm, delightful stupor overcomes him. He imagines that he is moving his forefinger, but he is not.*]

GAILEY (*noting the change*): Very full breath, Doctor, if you please. Keep the finger moving as long as you are conscious.

[*The finger moves feebly once or twice; then ceases. The arms and legs become inert.*]

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE: Om ! Om ! Om ! Om !  
Om ! Om ! Om ! Om ! Om ! Om ! Om ! Om ! Om ! Om !  
Om ! Om ! Om !

VATABEEL (*functioning through the spirit only, conscious of tremendous speed, tremendous space, and figures gathered around him in the gloom*): Strange ! Wonderful ! Astounding ! This is the same place I was in when I was operated on before. These are the same people. I hear voices. A most impressive company ! (*The figures begin to converse.*) This is immensity—all space—that surrounds me. I am not alive, really, and yet I am. Am I so important as this ? How dark, and yet how strangely light ! (*Feels a sense of great heaviness and great speed.*) This operating table is moving like lightning ! Who are these people about me ; not Bail or Gailey ? (*He thinks to see, but cannot.*) This is something else. I wonder if I shall come out of this ! Oh, the terror ! I really don't want to die ! I can't ! There are so many things I want to do. People *do* die under the influence of gas.

[*The arc of his flight bisects the first of a series of astral planes.*]

ALCEPHORAN (*a power of physics without form or substance, generating and superimposing ideas without let or hindrance. They come without word or form, and take possession as a mood and as understanding without thought*): Deep, deep and involute are the ways and the substance of things. Oh, endless reaches ! Oh, endless order ! Oh, endless disorder ! Death without life ! Life without death ! A sinking ! A rising ! An endless sinking ! An endless rising !

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE: Om ! Om ! Om ! Om !  
Om ! Om !

BAIL (*turning from the examination of the instruments and examining the eyes of VATABEEL, turning the lids up; to himself*): A remarkable man, very. Such sacrifices for his profession ! How persistently he has scorned money ! Great, and poor—that is my idea of a physician. (*To THE ANÆSTHETIST*) How is he now, Doctor ?

DRYDEN (*who is holding VATABEEL's left wrist*): Very good, I

think. (*He looks at GAILEY for confirmation.*) His pulse is one hundred and ten. His blood pressure seventy.

GAILEY: He is quite under.

BAIL (*lifting an arm and dropping it*): Excellent! (*To GAILEY and TUFTS*) Turn him on his right side, please. The scalpel and the retractor, please.

[*He takes up a scalpel and makes an incision one and one-half inches long by one-half inch deep. TUFTS sponges the blood.*]

VATABEEL (*an inert mass carried in the line of the earth's arc and becoming conscious of it, but unconscious of pain*): Oh, wonderful, wonderful! They are talking! It is light! It is dark! What is that they are saying? This rhythmic beat is so strange!

[*The arc of the earth bisects a second plane.*]

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE: Om! Om! Om! Om!  
Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om!  
Om! Om! Om!

FIRST SHADOW (*of the second astral plane; a tall grave man, seemingly with heavy dark whiskers and hair and deep blue eyes surveying VATABEEL's body as it speeds onward and he with it*): This man is of the greatest import, scientifically speaking, to his day. His trouble relates to Valerian, an element inimical to him. It is more serious than he thinks. It may be that he will not live. It may be that Valerian is unalterably opposed to him.

[*The voice becomes confused with other voices. Shadows gather about as though in conference. The operating table sweeps on at limitless speed.*]

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE: Om! Om! Om! Om!

SECOND SHADOW (*seemingly near; a surgeon in contact with the wound*): Very serious! Very serious! It lies closer to the large artery than they think. In fact, it surrounds it. A separating shield may help. This man should not be permitted to end yet. He is of great import to life.

[*Other shadows gather about in the gloom and confer. The shadow increases. The voices cease.*]

ALCEPHORAN: No high, no low ! No low, no high ! Time without measure, measure without time. A rising, a sinking ! An endless rising, and an endless sinking !

VATABEEL (*experiencing a vast depression as of endless space and unutterable loneliness*): Ah !!!

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE: Om ! Om ! Om ! Om !

[*The earth sweeps onward in its arc, bisecting a third plane.*

BAIL (*inserting a surgical spoon and scraping out the wound*): This thing is somewhat more serious than I thought. I believe the tumour surrounds the large artery. It has ramifications I hadn't thought were here. (*To GAILEY and one of THE NURSES, bending over*): Here are two side pockets to the left and one just below. And another ! We'll have to tie up some of these veins before I can go any farther. This artery is abnormally near the surface, to begin with. How is his pulse ?

[*He talks as he works, holding a bit of tissue up to the light, catching vein ends with hemostats, while GAILEY ties the knots with silk thread and THE NURSES pass thread and sponges.*

DRYDEN (*in charge of the tank and feeding cone*): One hundred and ten.

BAIL (*to himself*): Excellent.

VATABEEL (*sensing the line of the arc of his flight to be upward as yet*): Strange, I feel so comfortable, yet so helpless—Jason James Vatabeel, physician extraordinary, scientist. Of so much importance. Will I live ? Will I die ? Life is so treacherous, so sad !

FIRST SHADOW (*one of a new group, and a surgeon—as the operating table rushes into a new realm*): Difficult ! Difficult ! This man is in a very serious condition—much more serious than he imagines. The envy of elements ! His services to life are in great danger. I am not sure that he can return to the world.

[*He shakes his head with grave, oppressive solemnity, while the other shadows seem to listen and articulate.*

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE: Om ! Om ! Om ! Om !  
Om ! Om ! Om ! Om !



ALCEPHORAN: Deep below deep ! High above high ! No high ! No low ! Space beyond space ! Singleness without unity ! Unity without singleness !

VATABEEL (*awed and disturbed by the rush and confusion*): Spirits of the first order of earthly council. This mystery of living, how I have pondered it ! Vast orders and powers of which I know nothing. The terror of the after life—what may it be ? Death ? Annihilation ? No continuance ?—For ever and ever ? And in life itself—the mystery of the blood, of articulated bones, of organized society. Poverty, waste, hunger, pain, wealth, sickness, health—I have tried to think there was some good in what I've done. Vanity, hate, love, greed, patience, generosity. My fame is so wide, I know so little. (*He sighs deeply.*) Ah !

GAILEY (*noting the tendency to greater vitality, and so toward consciousness*): A little more gas, perhaps. This cutting is affecting him.

DRYDEN (*administering more*): I think so.

BAIL (*gouging at a second sac*): This is apt to shake him a little. Perhaps ether would have been better, after all. It is going to take longer than I thought. How is your oxygen ?

[*He is thinking of how much gas will have to be administered, and how much oxygen may be required to restore the patient.*]

DRYDEN (*who has received his supply from the institution*): All right, I think. (*He tries it. The examination proves that it is dangerously low. To WILLIAMS, his assistant*) See if you can find another tank.

[*BAIL frowns slightly, unconsciously irritated by the unpreparedness.*]

SECOND SHADOW (*of the second group—a stern, almost invisible figure*): I perceive near the cardiac region a tendency to weakness which is affected by gas. His condition is serious. Powers inimical and above us are at this moment producing error. This man is a powerful thinker and original investigator. Of him much might be expected.

[*The operating table sweeps on. THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE asserts itself.*]



VATABEEL (*in vast depression, lying as if under an immense, suffocating weight*): Precarious ! Precarious ! And I do not want to die. I have so much to live for, so much fame to seek, so much to do.

[*He sighs again.*]

DEMYAPHON (*nitrous oxide, also with the power of generating and superimposing huge ideas without let or hindrance, the capacity of the individual permitting. They come without word or form, taking possession as a mood or as understanding without thought*): So life is to be studied, and what for ? Your little experiments ! What do they teach you ? You seek to find out, to know !

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE: Om ! Om ! Om ! Om !

ALCEPHORAN (*at an angle to the waves of DEMYAPHON*): Vast ! Vast ! Vast ! Measure without time—time without measure !

DRYDEN (*noting VATABEEL's pulse to be greatly depressed and shutting off the gas, at the same time turning on the remaining oxygen*): My assistant is long about that oxygen. See if you can find him, Miss Karns.

[*A NURSE departs hurriedly.*]

BAIL (*realizing that he has a much more treacherous situation at hand than he imagined, and anxious for the safety of his patient; to THE ANÆSTHETIST*): Don't let him get too low, Doctor. It is these extra pockets. I shall be done shortly.

[*He hastens his efforts.*]

DRYDEN (*becoming disturbed over the delay of the oxygen, and lifting an eyelid to observe the condition of the patient's eyes*): Hm ! I don't like the look of that. (*Aloud*) Chafe his feet, Miss Hale. You had better move his arm up and down. (*The oxygen gives out.*) I don't understand this oxygen business.

MISS KARNS (*returning*): They have allowed the storeroom on this floor to run out. He has gone to the basement in the next building.

DRYDEN (*snapping his teeth*): Run and tell him to hurry, please. I am all out.

[*She departs.*]

DEMYAPHON (*appearing only as thoughts placed in the dreamer's mind*): There is a solution, but you will never be able to guess it. It is ages beyond a growth, which, when it is passed, you will be unable to remember. Æons upon æons, worlds upon worlds. Far and above the mysteries here and below are other mysteries—deep, deep. You puzzle over the phenomena of man. In a vain, critical, cynical, ambitious way you dream. It will all be wiped out and forgotten. To that which you seek there is no solution. A tool, a machine, you spin and spin on a given course through new worlds and old. Vain, vain ! For you there is no great end.

[*A sense of ruthless indifference, inutility, futility, overcomes the spirit of VATABEL.*

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE: Om ! Om ! Om ! Om !

ALCEPHORAN: Behind, before, beneath, above, presence without reality, reality without presence.

FIRST SHADOW (*of a third group, vague yet clear, young, experimental, curious, indifferent, obviously operating as a surgeon in charge*): We shall soon have done with this now. He bleeds a lot, doesn't he ? A bony old duffer ! A ligature, please. A hemostat. I don't see why I should have been given this to do. They say he is needed.

[*He seems to bend over. Other faces are near.*

SECOND SHADOW (*seemingly operating in charge of the gas and nose cone*): It looks as though this gas might prove too much, Doctor. His pulse is a little feeble.

FIRST SHADOW (*indifferently*): That can't be. We are two periods this side of the danger mark on this plane. We can leave him until he reaches the next one. He's safe enough.

[*The operating table, like a bier, rushes on. The shadows recede. Once more darkness and space, and a sense of rigidity and tomb-like confinement.*

THE ANÆSTHETIST (*anxiously*): Will you please go and see what's keeping them, Miss Hale ? He can't stand this much longer. His pulse is one hundred and forty now.

[*MISS HALE dashes from the room. BAIL, conscious of the lapse of oxygen gas, increases his efforts to cleanse and close the wound.*

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE: Om ! Om ! Om ! Om !

DEMYAPHON (*continuing*): So complicated that even the littlest things concerning man you cannot suspect. You think of forces as immense, silent, conglomerate, without thought, humour or individuality. I am a force, without dimension or form, yet I am an individuality, and I smile. (*A sense of something—vast and formless—cynically smiling, comes over VATABEEL, though he cannot conceive how. He is conscious of a desire to smile also, though in a hopelessly mechanical way.*) I am laughing gas, for one thing. You will laugh with me, because of me, shortly. You will not be able to help yourself. You are a mere machine run by forces which you cannot understand. This life that you seek—you may have it on condition, by a condition. You will find out what that is a little later, yet you will not know for certain.

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE: Om ! Om ! Om ! Om !

FIRST SHADOW (*of a fourth group—a young doctor—material, much more material than the last*): A little Valerian, please. Some iodine. Doing very well, don't you think, Doctor ?

SECOND SHADOW (*in charge of gas and feeder cone*): I am not so sure, Doctor. You will have to hurry. He isn't very strong. He should have been taken care of on the last plane. His eyelids—

FIRST SHADOW (*working briskly but indifferently*): Nonsense ! That can't be ! He's one point this side the danger mark on this plane. No hurry. He'll do well enough.

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE: Om ! Om ! Om ! Om !

THIRD SHADOW (*a nurse, suggestive of mild materiality, bending over*): He's sinking, Doctor, I tell you. He can't go much longer. Look at his hands ! Look at them ! He ought to be hurried to the earth plane.

[*The bier rushes on into space. The voices fade and cease.*]

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE (*resuming*): Om ! Om ! Om ! Om ! Om ! Om ! Om !

ALCEPHORAN: A rising, a sinking ! An endless rising ! An endless sinking ! Outward without inward—inward without outward. . . .

DEMYAPHON: Material planes that recede—each one more material than the other, as you sink into your own. Spirits almost more material than yourself. Because of the points spoken of as in your favour, you think you will regain life. You do not know that they are standards set by you in previous experiences, æons apart. To live, you will have to attain to a new one now.

VATABEEL: Ah !

DEMYAPHON: Round and round, operation upon operation, world upon world, hither and yon, so you come and go. The same difficulty, the same operation, ages and worlds apart. Your whole life repeated detail by detail except for slight changes. Now if you live, you must make an effort or die.

*[The gas smiles.]*

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE: Om ! Om ! Om ! Om !

DRYDEN (*to GAILEY*): He can't get back, Doctor, unless we get the oxygen here in thirty seconds. This tank is run out. His condition is desperate. (*He does the nurse's work, chafing one of VATABEEL's hands. To himself*) If he does, it will be the most wonderful case I ever heard of. A new standard, by George !

*[He wipes the perspiration from his brow.]*

VATABEEL (*struggling desperately to assist himself to live*): A thing of the spirit, this, plainly. I suppose I am a test, but how futile so to be. Round and round and round, an endless, pointless existence. Yet I cannot help myself. I must live. I must try. I do not want to die. (*He makes a great effort, concentrating his strength on the thought of life.*) Oh, how ruthless and indifferent it all is ! Think of our being mere machines to be used by others !

*[He struggles again, without physically stirring.]*

MISS KARNS AND MISS HALE (*hurrying in*): Here it comes now !

THE ASSISTANT (*in charge of tanks, following*): I had to go to the second building for the key. The floor man was over there. (*He quickly couples the connections, and the oxygen is turned on.*) Fine work, I call that !



DRYDEN (*bitterly*): What a system ! And half a dozen important operations on to-day !

[*He adjusts the cap and feeds the oxygen, full force.*]

VATABEEL: There is something vastly mysterious about this—horrible ! In older worlds I have been, worlds like this. I have done this same thing. Society has done all the things it has done over and over. We manufacture toys—the same toys over and over. Does Life produce its worlds and evolutions the same way ? Great God !

DEMYAPHON (*cynically*): The resistance which you are now displaying is in part by reason of your previous efforts and previous successes. You are the victim of experiences of which you have been made the victim. A patient, a subject, a tool, a method, round and round and round you go, a servant of higher forces, each time seemingly a step farther, each time in this way, for the same purpose, the same people, to no known end, over and over.

VATABEEL: Ah !

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE: Om ! Om ! Om ! Om !

GAILEY (*disturbed by his weakened condition, and uncertain whether or not he can be revived*): I am afraid that you will have to hurry, Doctor. He is very weak. His pulse is scarcely distinguishable.

BAIL (*desperately scraping the last pocket and tying the veins*): I am not supposed to be handicapped by poor service in this institution. Try to hold him a few moments. (*To TUFTS*) Sponge ! (*To the FIRST NURSE*) Scissors !

FIRST SHADOW (*of a fourth group just outside the gates of life, a very material young doctor, whose hands and white uniform are almost luminous*): Say, there isn't so much to do here—is there ? A few stitches. Those veins ought to be clamped, though. (*He works briskly, lightly, with an inconsequential air.*) He'll do all right, don't you think ?

SECOND SHADOW (*at the gas tank*): Pretty weak, I should say. Gad, yes ! He may hold out, though. They didn't shut off the gas on the last plane—that's a good sign. They usually do if it's serious. He's just at the turning-point.



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THIRD SHADOW (*a nurse apparently impressed by the uncertainty of the occasion*): He's very low, I tell you, Doctor. Look at his nails. You'd better shut off the gas. He's nearly all in ! Look at his eyes ! He's william, I tell you. He's william. He can't live thirty seconds more.

[*An intense disturbed rate of vibration indicates crisis. THE SECOND SHADOW shuts off the gas. The operating table rushes on into darkness.*]

VATABEEL (*thinking*): On, on—and I am now to die—I am dying, unless I can help myself ! An endlessly serviceable victim—an avatar ! The mystery of life—its gloomy complications ! But I don't want to die ! I won't die !

[*He concentrates vigorously on the idea of life.*]

DEMYAPHON (*smiling*): The points which you established on your previous circuit of this orbit of materiality, and which have been counting in your favour, have now been exhausted. This safety mark, which you have heard frequently mentioned, you yourself established. If you live, it will be by setting a new standard—rendering a new service but in an old way—over and over and over. Unless you struggle to live—unless you succeed in living——

VARIOUS VOICES: Try, oh try, oh try ! You, above all others !

[*VATABEEL senses some vast, generic, undecipherable human need. He wishes to weep, but cannot.*]

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE: Om ! Om ! Om ! Om !

[*A sense of derision, of indifference, of universal terror and futility, fills VATABEEL. Suffocating, he tries to move.*]

ALCEPHORAN: Deep below deep ! High above high ! No beginning, no end ! No end—no beginning !

VATABEEL (*terrified and yet seemingly helpless*): The dark ! The dark ! The ultimate dark ! Plane upon plane ! Æon upon æon ! To do over and over ! Or annihilation ! Why—oh—why ! But I won't die ! I can't.

[*He struggles again.*]

DEMYAPHON: It has no meaning ! Over and over ! Round and round ! The orbit of which you are a part brings you back and back again and again in non-understanding.

*[The thought seems to become rhythmic and painful.]*

VATABEEL (*struggling*): Am I really to die ? Oh, no ! ! What if I do go round and round ! I am a man ! Life is sweet, intense, perfect ! If I do go round and round, what of it ? Beyond this, what ? Nothing. I serve !

*[He stirs. His spirit struggles with materiality. The vital spark is rekindled within the inert frame. With a gigantic effort, it re-establishes itself and resumes control and respiration. The effort to inhale, feeble at the surface of materiality, is immense.]*

DRYDEN (*working the one free arm as vigorously as possible, while MISS HALE and MISS KARNS chafe the hands and feet*): There, he has caught it. Chafe his arms, Miss Karns. I am not sure that we can bring him round even yet. His vitality is amazing. I don't understand it at all. His heart was all right, though—extra strong.

BAIL: I shall have to take a few more seconds. I have three stitches to take. You may let him come out if you wish. This is the last time I shall use gas—here. I have had trouble enough with it before.

*[He tries to think where.]*

DEMYAPHON (*to VATABEEL*): And the humour of it is that it is without rhyme or reason. Over and over ! Æon after æon ! What you do now, you will do again. And there is no explanation. You are so eager to live—to do it again. Do you not see the humour of that ?

*[With sardonic intent the rate of vibration which is laughter is set up in VATABEEL's body. Even as he struggles to breathe and to regain his material state, he realizes that the impulse, a part of something vast, unearthly, mechanical, wavelike, is sweeping him into its rate. Weak from loss of blood—in danger of rupturing the large artery in the centre of the wound, close to the surface—he begins to swell with pent-up laughter. A dry, hard, sardonic desire to shout overcomes him, although he is yet unable to move.]*

DRYDEN (*to GAILEY, noting the customary action of nitrous oxide*

*as the patient approaches consciousness, and uncertain what to do*) : He is coming to. I'm a little afraid to use more gas in his present condition, Doctor. If he laughs too hard——!!

BAIL (*irritably*) : Can you keep him under ten more seconds? I have one more stitch to make.

[*He takes one.*

DRYDEN: I think he'll last that long, Doctor, anyhow.

[*Nurses and assistants seek to hold VATABEEL rigid, in order that the operation may not be disturbed.*

DEMYAPHON: And I told you you would laugh. You will eventually forget why, but you will shout and shout and see no reason. I am the reason. I am the master of your personality. I am Demyaphon—Laughing Gas. Shout ! Shout ! Shout !

[*It leaves VATABEEL in a waking condition.*

VATABEEL (*as BAIL takes the last stitch and GAILEY begins the bandaging of his neck, seemingly bursting into consciousness, the wound still unbandaged, the pain of the needle still fresh*) :

Oh, ho ! ho ! ho !

Oh, ha ! ha ! ha !

Oh, ho ! ho ! ho !

Oh, ha ! ha ! ha !

Oh, ho ! ho ! ho !

GAILEY (*holding one arm to calm him, uncertain as to whether he is mentally clear or not—as yet*) : Something very funny, Doctor ?

BAIL (*accustomed to the effects of laughing gas, but disturbed by his patient's condition ; to GAILEY*) : Make those bandages very tight. I'm afraid of that wound. It is too bad we couldn't have kept him under longer. He's very close to death even yet. I scarcely had time to take those stitches properly. And, of course, the effects of the gas have to be the very worst possible.

[*He shrugs his shoulders.*

VATABEEL (*still shaken by the rate of vibration set up in him, his mouth open, his face a mask of sardonic inanity*) :

Oh, ho ! ho ! ho !—oh, ha ! ha ! ha !  
 Oh, ho ! ho ! ho !—oh, ha ! ha ! ha !  
 Oh, ho ! ho ! ho !—oh, ha ! ha ! ha !

I see it all now ! Oh, what a joke ! Oh, what a trick ! Over and over ! And I can't help myself ! Oh, ho ! ho ! ho ! Oh, ha ! ha ! ha ! And the very laughing compulsory ! vibratory ! a universal scheme of laughing ! Oh, ho ! ho ! ho ! Ah, ha ! ha ! ha ! I have the answer ! I see the trick. The folly of medicine ! The folly of life ! Oh, ho ! ho ! ho ! Oh, ha ! ha ! ha ! Oh, ho ! ho ! ho ! Oh, ha ! ha ! ha ! What fools and tools we are ! What pawns ! What numbskulls ! Oh, ho ! ho ! ho ! Ah, ha ! ha ! ha !

*[His face has a sickly flatness, the while he glares with half-glazed eyes, and shakes his head.]*

GAILEY : I never saw gas act more vigorously. Did you, Doctor ?

BAIL (*annoyed by the incident*) : I never did. (*Taking his friend's arm*) Come, Jason, you're all right now ! Get over this ! Just laughing gas, you know. It's all over. You have a serious cut in your neck. (*He presses his arm fondly.*) You're just laughing because of the gas.

VATABEEL (*wearily—with the sense of immense futility still holding him*) : Oh, ho ! ho ! ho ! Oh, yes, yes, yes. Just laughing gas ! And that's why I laugh. Oh, ho ! ho ! ho ! Ah, ha ! ha ! ha ! I don't wonder it laughs ! I would too ! You would if you knew ! The mystery ! The cruelty ! The folly ! Oh, ho ! ho ! ho ! Oh, ha ! ha ! ha !

*[He stares and glares, the while his friends and hearers view him with kindly, condescending tolerance mingled with a touch of awe and amazement.]*

BAIL (*genially*) : Just the same, it's all over, Jason. Come on !

VATABEEL (*shaking himself and beginning to recover his natural poise and reserve*) : And was it only the gas, then ? I thought—I thought—I wonder ?

*[His mouth remains open.]*

DRYDEN (*his calmness restored*) : It seems odd to see him laughing like that.

GAILEY: The fumes are still in his head. He'll be all right now, though. That was a pretty close shave. I thought we had lost him. There'll be a new store-keeper here tomorrow, if I have my way.

THE SECOND ASSISTANT: I never saw Doctor Bail so irritated. He'll hold this against us.

*[The various doctors and nurses and assistants go about their duties. BAIL slowly leads VATABEEL to his car. VATABEEL's face retains a look of deep, amazed abstraction.]*

CURTAIN



Paul Green

THE NO 'COUNT BOY

*A Lyrical Comedy of Negro Life*

She flung her arms around me,  
And cast me silver and gold—  
Sing, where are you going, my lover?  
I'm going on down the road.

## CHARACTERS

PHEELIE

ENOS – her beau

THE NO 'COUNT BOY

AN OLD NEGRO WOMAN

TIME: *Several years ago.*

PLACE: *Before a farmhouse in eastern North Carolina.*

*The scene is the small yard immediately before a Negro cabin. At the right front is a thick lilac bush with a bench beside it, and to the left from this a clumpy china tree with a rocking-chair under it. At the left rear is a well, roughly boarded up, a chain and battered tin bucket hanging from a cross-piece above. In the back is the cabin. Rickety steps lead up to the door in the centre. It is an afternoon late in summer.*

PHEELIE, a neat Negro girl of seventeen, is sitting on the bench by the lilac tree looking through a book. She is dressed in cheap clothes—a white dress, white shoes and stockings. Presently there is the sound of an approaching buggy in the lane off at the left and a voice calls, “Whoa!” PHEELIE listens a moment, and then, without turning her head, gives it a toss and goes on fingering the leaves of her book. ENOS comes in at the left and stands watching her. He is a short, stocky Negro of twenty or more, dressed in a faded grey suit and black felt hat. His celluloid collar and scarlet tie shine out brilliantly against the black of his face.

ENOS (*in a drawling voice that now and then drops into a stammer*): Well, Pheelie, here I is.

PHEELIE (*looking up casually*): I see you is, and you’s ’bout a hour early.

ENOS: But ain’t you all dressed up to go?

PHEELIE: I’s dressed up, but I ain’t ready to go.

ENOS (*dubiously*): Well, suh, now—I—I——

PHEELIE: I just put on these here clothes ’cause it was so hot in the house with my work duds on.

[ENOS takes off his hat and discloses his naturally kinky hair combed back in a straight pompadour. He waits for her to notice it, but she keeps looking straight before her.]

Sit down and rest yourself.

[Somewhat ill at ease, he sits down in the rocking-chair and watches her.]

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ENOS: I dropped by a little early, hoping—a—maybe you'd like to take a small drive before church begun.

PHEELIE (*in the same cold voice*): Thanky, I don't believe I want to take no drive.

[*She becomes absorbed in her book.*

ENOS (*picking at the lining of his hat*): And I thought we might stop at Buie's Creek and get some ice cream.

[*He watches her narrowly.*

PHEELIE (*after a moment*): That'd be nice, I reckon, but I don't want no ice cream neither. (*She is silent again. He pulls nervously at his fingers, making the joints pop.*) And I'd be much obliged if you'd quit popping your finger joints.

ENOS (*jerking his hands apart and running his fingers over his greased hair*): 'Scuse me, Pheelie. (*Somewhat timidly, but with a hidden touch of spirit*) You—you don't seem glad to see me much.

PHEELIE: You didn't have no date to come over here a hour before time.

ENOS (*worried*): I knows it. But what's the matter with you? You ain't mad at me, is you?

PHEELIE: No, I ain't mad.

ENOS: Seems like you'd rather look at that old book than talk to me.

PHEELIE: Maybe I had.

[*He feels his tie, twirls his hat, and spits softly through his teeth off to one side.*

ENOS: What sort of book is it, Pheelie?

PHEELIE: What difference do it make to you? You ain't interested in no book.

ENOS: 'Spect that's right. But you sure seems more took with it than anything I ever seed you have before.

PHEELIE: It's a fine picture book.

ENOS: Where'd you get it?

PHEELIE: This morning I was up to Mis' Ella's helping her hoe out the garden, and she told me a whole heap about the places she and Mr. Jack went when they was married. And she give me this book that showed a passel of things.

ENOS: Hunh, they had money to travel with and enjoy themselves.

PHEELIE: She said one place they went to was some sort of Falls or something like that, where the water poured over in a great river and made a racket same as the world was busting up.

ENOS: That ain't nothing—mostly talk, I bet a dollar.

PHEELIE (*closing the book with a bang*): That's what you always say. You don't care a straw about going off and seeing things.

ENOS (*sharply*): Ain't I done told you, honey bunch, we ain't going to have no money to be traipsing round the world, not yet nohow.

PHEELIE: Don't you honey me no more, I tells you.

ENOS (*amazed*): What'n the name of Old Scratch ails you? Ain't I got a right to honey you—and you engaged to me?

PHEELIE: Engaged to you ! It's you engaged to me.

ENOS: Aw right. I's engaged to you, then, and you knows mighty drot'n well I's glad to be, too. They ain't no put-on with me.

PHEELIE: I reckon you is glad. But mess with me and you won't be engaged to nothing.

ENOS (*pleadingly*): Now, Pheelie, you better throw that book in the fire and come on and let's go for a drive; it's stirred you all up. Come on, I's got a mess of news to tell you.

PHEELIE: I ain't going on no drive. And I's about decided not to go with you to no meeting to-night neither.

ENOS (*alarmed*): Lord, don't talk like that. Here I's been waiting all the week for this Saturday night, and you ain't going back on me, is you?



PHEELIE (*softening*): But, Enos, you's so samey; allus satisfied with what you has. You just gets my goat.

ENOS (*humbly*): If you means I ain't took with no wild ideas or such about trips way off yonder to see folks making fools of theirselves, then I is samey. But you listen here, child; they ain't no miracles and such off there like what you thinks. Once I spent a good five dollars going on a 'scursion to Wilmington, and they weren't a thing to see, not half as much as they is on this here farm.

PHEELIE: You got to have eyes to see things. Some folks is naturally born blind.

ENOS (*placatingly*): Well, maybe when we's married we'll take a little trip to Raleigh or Durham and see the street cars and big buildings.

PHEELIE: But I wants to go further, clean to the mountains, and right on then, maybe.

ENOS: By craps, must think I got a can of money buried somewhere.

PHEELIE: I don't neither. Us could hobo, or walk part the way—just fool along.

ENOS (*laughing*): Hobo! Us'd hobo right into some white man's jail, that's what. And they ain't nothing to that walking business. We'd be a purty sight with our feet blistered and somebody's bulldog tearing plugs out'n—well, you knows what.

PHEELIE (*ignoring his reply*): Sitting there looking through that book I got plumb sick and tired of you and all this farming and sweating and getting nowhere—sick of everything. And just looking at old lazy lawrence dancing over the fields made me want to throw up.

ENOS (*eyeing her*): Honey child, the last time I was here you said you'd like working in the fields with me and keeping the house and such.

PHEELIE: I will, Enos, I reckons I will. But that there book set me wanting to go off and get away.

ENOS (*moving his chair over to her*): Listen to me. I knows

I ain't fitten to breathe on you, but I's going to do my best by you. And what you reckon? Mr. Pearson done told me to-day that he's having the lumber sawed to build our house. September she'll be done, then you'n me can have business—can see the preacher.

PHEELIE: Mr. Pearson's good to you all right.

ENOS: Ain't he! That's a man what is a man. And it ain't all for me he's building that house. He likes you and says he'll be glad to have you on his place.

PHEELIE (*with signs of interest*): What kind of house is it—just a shack with a stick-and-dirt chimney?

ENOS (*jubilantly*): Now I was just a-hoping you'd ask that. No, suh, it ain't no cow-shed you could throw a dog through the cracks—nunh-unh. It's going to be a nice frame house with a wide porch, and it'll be ceiled. And listen here, it's going to have wallpaper. And, honey, Mr. Pearson said he wanted you to come up a-Monday and help choose the pattern.

[*He looks at her delightedly.*]

PHEELIE (*her face brightening somewhat*): Oh, that's so nice of you and him!

[*She bows her head.*]

ENOS: What's the matter now?

PHEELIE (*looking up with tears in her eyes*): You's too good to me, Enos, and I hadn't ought to always be so unsatisfied.

ENOS: Sure, never mind now.

[*He puts his arm around her.*]

PHEELIE (*letting her hand rest on his hair*): Grannys alive! You done spent money to get your hair straightened.

ENOS (*with a kind of shamed joy*): Yeh, yeh, I has. But it was to celebrate a little.

PHEELIE: That's throwing away a dollar and a half. In a little bit it'll be kinky again.

ENOS: 'Course it will, but I thought you'd like it while it lasts.

PHEELIE (*laughing*): You sure is a proud nigger. (*She kisses him quickly and stands away from him.*) Nunh-unh, I ain't goin' to do it no more.

[*He drops reluctantly into his seat, and she sits again on the bench.*]

ENOS (*after a moment*): You want to take that little drive now?

PHEELIE: I might, I guess.

ENOS (*slapping himself*): Hot dog, then let's go, honey!

PHEELIE (*brightly*): Let me shut up the house and we'll be ready. Muh and Pap and all the kids is over to the ice-cream supper at Uncle Haywood's before preaching.

[*She stands up.*]

ENOS (*standing up likewise*): All right, honey babe. I sure likes to see you jollied up. And I's got another surprise for you, too.

PHEELIE (*stopping*): You has?

ENOS (*mysteriously*): Unh-hunh. But I'll tell you a little later.

PHEELIE: Naw, suh, tell me now—please.

ENOS (*anxious to tell it*): In course I can't stand out against you. Well, we ain't going to drive behind no flop-eared mule this time.

PHEELIE: We ain't!

[*She starts towards the left to look out.*]

ENOS: Naw, suh, I's driving Egypt to-day.

PHEELIE: Mr. Pearson's fine horse!

ENOS (*grinning*): Yeh, yeh, sure is. I worked hard all the week and this morning he come to me and asked me if I didn't want Egypt to haul you with to-night.

PHEELIE (*looking off*): There he is. Ain't that fine, and is he safe?

ENOS: Safe ! Safe as a cellar. But, Lord, he can burn the wind !

PHEELIE: Goody-good. Now come help me shut the house.

ENOS (*as they go off at the left rear*): Mr. Pearson knows I ain't going to beat his stock and bellows 'em like some the niggers. I tells you, sugar lump, if we stays with him and do right, some these days we going to have money to take them there trips you wants to.

[*They have hardly disappeared when a slender Negro youth of sixteen or seventeen, barefooted and raggedly dressed in an old pair of overalls, shirt and torn straw hat, comes in at the right front and stands staring after them. He is whittling a green walking-stick. In a moment he pulls out a small mouth-organ and begins playing a whirling jig.*

ENOS (*coming back around the corner*): Who's that playing to beat the band ?

[*He and PHEELIE come back into the yard. PHEELIE stares at THE BOY in delighted astonishment. Suddenly he winds up on a high note. As he beats the harp against his thigh, he bursts into a loud joyous laugh.*

PHEELIE: Lord ! You can play. Who is you ?

ENOS (*with a touch of authority in his voice*): What you want here ? I ain't never seed you before.

BOY (*in a clear childish voice, as he looks at PHEELIE*): You ain't ?

ENOS: Naw, I ain't. What you mean walking up in people's yards and acting like you was home ?

BOY: I thought I might get me a drink from the well there.

PHEELIE: Help yourself.

[*He draws water and drinks. ENOS and PHEELIE watch him.*

ENOS (*in a low voice*): I bet he's some boy run away from home. Maybe a tramp, I dunno.

PHEELIE: That boy a tramp ! Hunh, he ain't no such.

ENOS: I bet you on it. Looks 'spicious to me.

BOY (*returning from the well and wiping his mouth with his sleeve*): I thought I might get a bite to eat here maybe.

[*He looks from one to the other, a lurking smile in his eyes.*]

PHEELIE (*uncertainly*): You might.

ENOS: Like as not the lady wants to know where you come from and what your business is before she begins to feed you.

BOY (*looking at PHEELIE*): Would you?

PHEELIE: Yeh. What's your name?

BOY (*laughing and blowing out a whiff of music*): Mostly I ain't got no name. (*Beating the harp in his hand and scratching his leg with his toe*) 'Way, 'way back down there (*pointing indefinitely behind him*), where I come from, some of 'em calls me Pete, but mostly they calls me the No 'Count Boy.

ENOS: Why they call you that for?

BOY (*laughing again*): 'Cause I don't like to work in the fields.

ENOS: Unh-hunh, unh-hunh, I s'picioned it.

BOY: S'picioned what?

ENOS: Aw, nothing. Anyhow, that's a good name for you, I bet. Whose boy is you and where'd you come from 'way back down there as you call it?

BOY (*quickly*): Cuts no wool whose boy I is. As for where I come from, I can't tell you, bo, 'cause I dunno hardly. (*Hesitating and pointing off to the right*) You see where the sky come down to the earth—'way, 'way yonder?

ENOS: I sees it.

BOY (*grinning to himself*): Well, I come from miles and miles beyond it. (*A kind of awe creeping into his words*) Lord, Lord, how far has I come?

PHEELIE: You been all that distance by yourself?

BOY: Sure has. And what's more I walked it every jump.

[*Again he draws the harp across his lips in a breath of music, all the while watching them with bright eyes.*]



ENOS: Where you going?

BOY: Just going.

PHEELIE: You mean you ain't got no special place in mind? You just hoboing along?

BOY: That's it, I reckon.

ENOS: How does you get your rations? Beg for it?

BOY: I pays for it when I can get 'em. Times I goes hungry.

ENOS (*looking at him keenly*): You ain't got no money, has you?

BOY (*cunningly*): That's all right. I pays for it just the same. (*He stops and looks at PHEELIE with big eyes.*) You's pretty as a pink, ain't you?

PHEELIE (*turning away her head*): Why you ask that?

ENOS (*sharply*): You needn't be thinking you going to get your supper on soft talk, horse-cake.

BOY (*still looking at PHEELIE*): What's your name?

PHEELIE: My name's Ophelia, but they calls me Pheelie.

BOY (*staring at her admiringly and cracking his palm against his thigh*): Dawg-gone! Just like me for the world. I's named one thing and they calls me another.

ENOS (*with a hint of uneasiness*): Here, I 'spects you better be going on up the road. Me'n Miss Pheelie just ready to go out for our afternoon drive, and we don't want to be bothered with nobody's no 'count boy.

BOY (*his face falling*): I hates to hinder you, Miss Pheelie, and can't I get nothing to eat—a 'tater or anything?

PHEELIE: I 'spect I could give you a snack in your hand right quick.

BOY: No sooner said'n done, I hopes. And I pays you for it, too.

ENOS (*almost sarcastically*): Got your pockets full of silver and gold, apt as not.

BOY : Naw, suh, I got something better'n new money. Here she is. (*Holding up his harp*) I plays you a piece or two pieces or three, and you gives me a bite and what you pleases. (*In mock seriousness he pulls off his hat and addresses them*) Ladies and ge'men, the first piece I renders is called "The Dark-eyed Woman." It's music 'bout a woman what had three little boys, and they took sick and died one June night whilst the mocking-birds was singing. And always after that they said she had a dark shadow in her dark eyes.

[*He clears his throat, spits once or twice and lays the harp gently to his lips. Closing his eyes, he begins to play. ENOS stirs about him as the notes flood the boy's mouth, and now and then he looks questioningly at PHEELIE's averted face. THE BOY's nostrils quiver, and he makes a sobbing sound in his throat. Tears begin to pour down his cheeks. After a moment he winds up with a flourish.*

ENOS (*gruffly*) : Lord Jesus ! That rascal can blow !

BOY (*looking at PHEELIE as he wipes his eyes*) : I hope you don't mind. Every time I blows that piece I cries.

[*PHEELIE glances up with moist eyes.*

PHEELIE : I sure don't mind. Where you learn that ?

BOY : It's a made piece.

ENOS : Who made it ?

BOY : Me.

ENOS (*ironically*) : Hunh, you might !

BOY (*his face troubled*) : You believes I made it, don't you, Miss Pheelie ?

PHEELIE : That I do.

BOY (*his face clearing*) : All right then. And I'll play you another piece for that snack of grub.

PHEELIE : That one's enough to pay.

ENOS : You sure you didn't get no rations down the road ?

BOY : Not nary a chaw.

PHEELIE : Ain't you had nothing all day ?

BOY: Nothing but some branch water and a little bitsy bird I killed with a rock and fried.

[*His face takes on a sober look, and tears again glisten in his eyes.*]

ENOS (*looking at him in astonishment*): You sure is a queer fellow.

BOY (*staring up at the sky*): That little bird was singing so sweet and ruffling his breast in the wind, and I picked up a rock and just throwed devilish like, never thought I'd hit him. But that's the way it is—when you thinks you won't, you does, and I kilt him.

PHEELIE: And then you et him?

BOY (*wiping his eyes on his sleeves*): I was so hungry then, and I built a speck of fire and baked him. (*Wretchedly*) Wasn't it better for me to eat him than for maggots to get at him?

PHEELIE: 'Twas that.

BOY (*mournfully*): But I sure felt bad about that little bird. I can't get his tune out'n my head. He sot on that limb and would give a long call and then a short one—(*imitating on his harmonica*)—just like that.

ENOS: You's a mighty big fellow to be crying over a bird, seems like to me.

PHEELIE: Enos, you quit that making fun.

BOY: When I come through the creek back there, a good-god was pecking in a high dead tree, and he turned his head sideways and whickered at me. I heard him say he going to ha'nt me for killing that bird.

ENOS: I swear!

[*PHEELIE gives him a cutting look, and he stops his laughing.*]

BOY: I've hear'n that them good-gods is old women turned to birds 'cause they was wicked. And you see they's still got on little old red caps.

PHEELIE: They won't hurt you.

ENOS: Pshaw, they ain't nothing but great big sapsuckers.

BOY: How you know? Just the same, this 'un scolded me for throwing that rock. I could tell it in his talk and the way he looked at me.

PHEELIE: You didn't mean to do it nohow, and you was hungry, too. Now play us some more.

BOY: I 'spect maybe then it's all right, I 'spect so. Now I plays you my other piece to pay you plenty for my eatings.

PHEELIE: 'Tain't that; 'tain't that. We likes to hear you. I'll feed you for nothing.

BOY: Well, listen to this, folkses, this moan song.

*[He again pulls off his hat and makes his stage bow.]*

Ladies and gentlemen, this is a talking piece I's going to render. It's 'titled "The Coffin Song," and tells about a nice girl what went away from home all dressed out in white and died, and they sont her body back to her muh and pap. This here's the coast-line coming down the track on a dark and rainy night with her coffin on board.

*[He closes his eyes and begins blowing the "Choo-kerr-choo" of a starting train. He intersperses his blowing with short speeches.]*

The rain is beating on the window panes and everybody is mournful.

*[The "Choo-kerr-chooing" takes on a sobbing note, and the speed of the train increases.]*

The old man and the woman is at the station waiting for their daughter's body, her they loved so well—oh, her they loved so well. "Don't cry, honey, she gone to heaven," the old man say. "Lord! Lord!" the old man say. Then he hear that coffin-blow.

*[A long mournful wail of the engine's whistle follows, swallowed up in the growing speed of the locomotive. He opens his eyes and begins to chant his bits of dialogue.]*

Now she's balling the jack 'cross the river trestle.

*[He quivers and sings with the straining timbers of the bridge,]*  
Here she is passing by the gravel-pit. How she goes by!  
How she goes by! Like a great black horse—a great black horse! And now she's blowing for the crossing.

*[The whistle moans again.*

Her muh and pap's on the platform at the station and they feel their hearts in their mouths at the crying of that train. Lord ! Lord ! the crying of that train !

*[Again he gives the coffin-blow, long and heart-breaking.*

The train she slow up.

*[The " Choo-kerr-chooing " slowly stops.*

They takes out the coffin and flowers and puts her in a hearse, and they all drives off slow, slow, like this.

*[He plays a sort of dead march and stalks back and forth across the yard.*

Then the next day they takes her to the graveyard, the lonesome graveyard. And the preacher preach—shout " Hallelujah !"—the preacher preach and the people sing, shouting glory to the Lamb. And then they begin to throw dirt in on her.

*[He imitates the thump, thump of clods falling on the coffin.*

Then the father and mother and sisters and brothers all cry out loud. Her pap cries like this.

*[He gives forth a long deep groan.*

And the sisters and brothers like this.

*[A medley of weeping sounds.*

And the mother cry like this.

*[A high piercing shriek.*

And then they roach up the grave and the preacher make prayer—" Lord, Lord Jesus, have mercy upon us ! " Then they all go off and they ain't nothing left 'cepting a crow in a high scraggly pine a-saying :

*[He mingles his music with a raucous " H-a-r-r-c-k ! h-a-r-r-c-k ! " ]*

Then after that when night come, dark and rainy night, the last thing is a small wind in the bushes like this :

*[A trembling flute-like note rises, bubbles and disappears. He beats the harp against his hand and looks uncertainly at ENOS and PHEELIE, the tears wetting his cheeks.*



ENOS (*presently*): I can't deny you got the world beat handling that baby, but what'n the name o' God makes you cry so much?

BOY (*watching PHEELIE's bowed head*): When I plays that piece I feel so lonesome like I can't help crying, I always cries.

ENOS: I's seed folks cry when their people died, but, Lord, I never seed no such cry-baby as you.

BOY: You's hard-hearted. Look at Miss Pheelie, she's crying.

ENOS: Help my life! What ails you, Pheelie?

PHEELIE (*hurriedly drying her eyes*): Don't make no fun of me, Enos. I just had the blues again.

ENOS (*patting his hat anxiously*): Here, don't you get to feeling that a-way no more, honey. Let's go on with our drive.

BOY: You calls her honey!

ENOS: That I do. She's my girl, that's what. And listen to me—I don't want no no 'count fellow come piddling by with a harp and wild talk to get her upset.

BOY (*unhappily*): I didn't know you was her man. I—I thought she was too pretty and like a angel for that.

[PHEELIE looks at him tearfully and he gazes back warmly.]

ENOS (*angrily*): Look out, nigger. Mind what you's up to!

PHEELIE: Enos, you quit talking to that boy like that.

ENOS (*coming up to her and catching her by the arm*): Come on now and let that fellow go on where he's started.

PHEELIE (*springing up*): Turn me a-loose. He's going to stay right here if he wants to and eat and sleep to boot.

ENOS (*hesitating a moment and then flaring out, his timidity and slowness gone*): The hell you say! (*He turns suddenly towards the boy and points off to the left.*) You see 'way, 'way yonder in the west where the sun is setting in the tops of them long-straw-pines?

BOY (*questioningly*): Yeh, yeh, I sees it.

ENOS (*moving towards him*): Well, I wants you to get in that road and in three minutes start there.

PHEELIE (*putting herself quickly before him*): He ain't, I tell you.

BOY (*emboldened by PHEELIE's protection*): You means you wants to run me off before I gets any rations?

ENOS: I don't care whether you gets any rations or not. I wants you to leave here before you gets Pheelie all tore up with your foolish notions. (*Snapping*) You better get from here.

BOY (*swinging his stick before him and smiling with weak grimness*): Ah—hah—I ain't going. (*ENOS makes another step towards him.*) Don't you come towards me. I'll split your head open with this here stick.

[*ENOS stops and eyes him cautiously. THE BOY holds his stick in trembling readiness.*]

PHEELIE (*getting between them*): I tells you, Enos Atkins, you ain't going to harm nary a hair of this boy's head. You do and I'll scratch your eyes out apt as not.

ENOS: God A'mighty ! done hyp'otized with him already, is you ? (*In a wheedling tone*) Now, boy, can't you see how it is with me ? We was just ready to go off to church, and here you pops up and sets yourself in betwixt us. (*He feels in his pockets and pulls out a dollar.*) Here, take this dollar and go on. You can buy enough grub with it to last you a week.

BOY (*breaking into a loud derisive laugh*): Ain't he a sight trying to hire me off from his girl !

ENOS: Them there laughs is likely going to be tacks in your coffin. (*THE BOY closes his eyes in merriment. With a quick movement, ENOS snatches his stick from him.*) Now see if you don't strike a trot up that road. (*He puts out his arm and pushes PHEELIE back. Egypt is heard off at the left pawing the ground and shaking his bridle.*) Whoa, Egypt !

BOY (*half whimpering*): Don't hit me with that stick.

ENOS: I ain't going to hit you if you lights a rag out'n here

this minute. Scat, or I'll wring your neck. Make yourself scarce, nigger.

PHEELIE: Let him alone. Let him alone. I tells you!

BOY: You better go tend to your horse, bo. I hear him trying to get loose.

ENOS (*looking appealingly at PHEELIE*): Egypt's getting restless, Pheelie. You about ready to be driving now? (*He steps to the left and calls.*) Whoa! whoa there, Egypt! Come on, Pheelie, and let's go.

PHEELIE (*shaking her head determinedly*): I ain't going on no drive with you, and that's my last say.

ENOS: Oh, hell fire! (*He lowers his stick. At the left he turns and speaks.*) You just wait here, you little pole-cat, and I'll fix you yet.

[*He hurries out.*]

BOY (*turning boldly back into the yard*): Hunh. That nigger ain't nothing but bluff.

PHEELIE: And he ain't going to make you leave neither. You stay right with him.

BOY: He thinks you's getting to liking me, that's what he thinks.

[*He falls to staring at her intently.*]

PHEELIE: Why you look at me like that?

BOY (*shyly*): How old is you?

PHEELIE: Seventeen.

BOY (*joyously*): Is? Then we's just the same age. Can't—can't I call you Pheelie?

PHEELIE (*looking at the ground*): Yeh, yeh, you can.

BOY: I feels just like I knowed you all my life, and I ain't never seed nobody like you in all my progueings, nobody—and I's travelled a heap, too.

PHEELIE: And you's seed a monstrous lot where you travelled, ain't you? Yeh, you has, I bet.

BOY: I has that—Lord, Lord !

PHEELIE (*dropping into the rocking-chair*): Has you seed any big rivers and waters and such ?

BOY: Rivers ! Lord, yeh !

PHEELIE: Has you been by a place where a great river pours over a steep hill roaring like the Judgment Day ?

BOY (*dropping on his knees and marking in the dirt as he ponders*): I dunno—Yeh, yeh, that river was two miles wide and you had to stop your ears in a mile of it.

PHEELIE: Go on, go on. Tell me some more. Has you been in any big towns ?

BOY: Has I ? I's been in towns that had streets so long they wasn't no coming to the end of 'em.

PHEELIE: Was they many people there ?

BOY: People ! People ! (*He rolls over on the ground at the remembrance of it and then sits up.*) All kinds and sizes. People running, people walking, some wearing diamont dresses and gold shoes. Rich, my, my, how rich ! Automobiles as big as that house, with horns that jar like a earthquake and boiler busting all at once.

PHEELIE (*a little dubiously*): Aw——

BOY: Hit's so. And street cars running with nothing pulling or pushing 'em. And buildings so high that the moon brushes the top. High ! Lord, Lord, how high ! And people hauling money with trains, big train loads where they keeps it in a big house with a school breaking of folks to guard it.

PHEELIE: I been looking at pictures in this book, but nothing fine as that.

[*She brings the book and shows it to him.*]

BOY (*somewhat disturbed*): Yeh, I's got a book like that. (*He begins picking his teeth meditatively with a straw.*) It was give to me by a peddling man. (*Smiling wisely*) But that was before I went out travelling for myself. Lord, Lord ! Compared to what I seed in New York, that book ain't nothing.

PHEELIE: New York ! You been there ?

BOY: That I has. She's a long ways yonder, too, maybe two hundred miles, who knows. But Pheelie, that's the place to go; everything easy, people good to you, nothing to do but eat ice cream and maybe now and then drink lemonade—and see people, people ! Worse'n the fair at Dunn. Never seed such a mess of people.

[ENOS is heard quieting his horse.

PHEELIE: How'd you travel so far and pay your way ? Must take a lot of money.

BOY: I walked—that's how ; bum my way. And when I gets hungry I plays my harp.

PHEELIE: Where you sleep ?

BOY: You don't know nothing about travelling, does you ? I sleeps on the warm ground. Come sunset, I stops in a hollow and breaks down bushes and rakes up pine-straw and sleeps like a log. And in the morning I wakes and sees the dew on everything and hears the birds singing, and I lies there a while and practise on my harp. Then I's off down the road breathing the fine air and feeling just as happy as I can.

PHEELIE (*vehemently*): I done told Enos we could do like that. I sure has told him time and again.

BOY: Would you like to live that a-way ?

PHEELIE: Unh—hunh. Yeh, oh, yeh, I would.

BOY (*earnestly*): Why can't you, Pheelie ?

PHEELIE (*twisting her hands nervously*): I dunno—I wants to—I do want to go and keep on going.

BOY (*leaning quickly forward*): Pheelie, Pheelie, come on with me and go tramping through the world. You can leave that bench-leg, Enos, behind.

PHEELIE (*turning impulsively towards him and then dropping her head*): I can't do it. I's afraid to.

[ENOS slips in at the left rear and watches them.



BOY: I tell you we would have the best time going. Come on and go with me.

PHEELIE (*hesitating*): I—might do it—I's half tempted to do it.

BOY (*catching her hand*): I tells you what. How about me waiting out in the woods there till dark comes down and then you can put on a old dress and join me?

PHEELIE (*pulling her hand unwillingly from him*): That'd be fine—fine, but wouldn't folks raise Cain?

BOY: Let 'em. What you'n me care? We'll be splashing in the rain and shouting in the sun. And we'll step along together, and I'll hold your pretty little hand and you'll hold mine, and I'll teach you to sing songs. I knows a bushel of pretty ones. And then I'll learn you how to blow my harp. And we'll slip down the roads at sunrise and sunset, singing and blowing the finest tunes they is. Please'm, say you'll go with me.

PHEELIE (*with shining eyes*): You has the purtiest talk of any man or boy I ever seed, and oh, I wish—wish—— (*With sudden abandon*) Yeh, yeh, I will—I will, I'll go.

[*Ecstatically he touches her arm and looks straight into her eyes.*]

BOY (*cooingly*): Birdie mine, birdie mine.

[*He stands up and bends over her chair.*]

PHEELIE (*her face alight as she leans her head against him*): Oh, it makes my head swim to think of all we's going to see and hear.

[*He timidly puts his arm over her shoulder. ENOS throws his stick behind him, springs forward and snatches THE BOY away from PHEELIE.*]

ENOS: Here, you low-down rascal, trying to steal my girl, is you? Oh, yeh, I been hearing what you said. (*His nostrils dilating*) And I's going to give you a kick in the seat of your britches that'll send you where you's going.

BOY (*retreating behind PHEELIE*): I ain't trying to steal her, neither. She don't care nothing for you and wants to go on with me.

ENOS: That's a lie, you little ficey fool, and you better look out before I gives you the lock-jaw.

BOY: She much as said she don't love you, now then.

ENOS: You didn't say that, did you, Pheelie?

PHEELIE: I dunno whether I loves you or not.

ENOS (*turning savagely upon THE BOY*): Damn your soul, I got a notion to ham-string you. (*He makes a movement towards the boy, who darts over to the left, sees his walking-stick and seizes it.*) You just come here rolling off your lies by the yard and tear up everything! Why don't you leave? Want me to bring out a feather bed and wash your feet and sing to you and fan you and put you to sleep, does you? (*Jumping forward*) I'll put you to sleep!

BOY (*falling quickly behind PHEELIE and drawing his stick*): You make another move at me and I'll crush your skull.

PHEELIE (*crying out*): Enos, stop that, stop that!

ENOS (*sarcastically*): Yeh, and who's you to order me—you lost every ray of sense you ever had! Wouldn't you be a pretty fool running off with this here woods-colt and sleeping in the jambs of fences and old hog beds and scratching fleas like a mangy hound! (*His voice rising high in wrath*) That you would. And in winter weather you'd have your shirt-tail friz to you hard as iron. You'd be a sight for sore eyes!

PHEELIE: Shut up. Boy, I wouldn't let him call me no woods-colt.

BOY (*weakly*): Don't you call me that.

ENOS (*taking off his coat*): Call you that! I ain't started yet. I's going to twist off both your ears and make you eat 'em without no salt. Hell, you ain't got no more backbone than a ground puppy.

BOY (*trembling and clinging to his stick*): Pheelie, Pheelie, don't let him get at me.

PHEELIE: Don't you hurt that boy, I tells you again.

ENOS (*laughing brutally*): Hurt him! I's going to crucify

him. (*He begins circling PHEELIE. THE BOY keeps on the opposite side. ENOS reaches out and pulls PHEELIE behind him.*) Now, my little son of a gun, where is you ?

BOY (*in desperation raising his stick*) : Don't you come near me.

[*ENOS makes a dart at him. THE BOY starts to flee, but as ENOS clutches him, he turns and brings his stick awkwardly down on his head. ENOS staggers and falls to his knees.*

PHEELIE (*looking on in amazement and then screaming*) : Lord, you's kilt Enos !

[*She stands in uncertainty, and then runs and holds him to her.*

BOY (*in a scared voice as he drops his stick*) : Mercy, what's I going to do ? Is—is you hurt, Enos ?

[*ENOS groans.*

PHEELIE : Get out'n here, you, you. You's murdered my husband. Enos, Enos, honey baby, is you hurt bad ?

[*He groans again and she helps him to a chair.*

ENOS (*twisting his head from side to side*) : Hurt ? Nothing but a little crack. That lizard ain't strong enough to kill a flea with a sledge-hammer. (*He suddenly whirls around and runs his tongue out, snarling at THE BOY*) Ya-a-a-h ! (*THE BOY bounds backwards and, tripping over the bench, falls sprawling on the ground.*) See there, blowing my breath on him throws him into fits.

[*THE BOY lies stretched out still.*

PHEELIE : Oh, my Lordy, you—I believes he's dead or something !]

ENOS (*trying to hide his fear*) : Sure nothing but the breath knocked out'n him.

PHEELIE (*shrilly, as she bends above THE BOY*) : He's hurt, I tells you. Poor boy. (*Turning towards ENOS*) What if you's kilt him ?

ENOS (*rubbing his head*) : Shut up. He ain't hurt bad.

PHEELIE : You hateful, mule-beating rascal, he is hurt. (*Moaning over him*) Oh, my sweet honey-boy.

BOY (*sitting up*): Jesus, that fall jarred the wind out'n my stomach. (*Suddenly getting to his feet and eyeing ENOS fearfully*) Don't let that man make at me.

PHEELIE: I don't reckon he will. You given him a dose to last for a while.

ENOS (*standing up*): A dose! Hunh, he can't faze me with no little tap on the skull. (*He begins rolling up his sleeves. There is a hail off at the right front.*) And now I rolls up my sleeves for the hog-killing.

PHEELIE: You all stop that rowing now. Yonder comes somebody.

[THE BOY *reaches down and gets his harp out of the dirt.*

ENOS: Who is that? Some old woman in a steer cart.

BOY (*looking up hastily*): Lord Jesus, that's—who's that! Hide me, people, hide me quick so's she can't get to me. (*He looks around him in terror.*) Where must I go?

PHEELIE: Why you scared of her?

BOY: Pheelie, put me somewhere, cover me quick!

PHEELIE: Drop down on your knees, she's coming up the path. Better get behind the house maybe.

BOY (*on his all-fours*): And if she asks for me, don't you tell her.

PHEELIE: We'll tell her we ain't seed hair nor hide of you. But I can't see why you so tore up. (*He crawls rapidly off at the left rear around the house.*) Now, Enos, you keep your mouth closed. They's something up—that boy afraid so.

ENOS: They is something up, and my suspicions is coming to the top.

OLD WOMAN (*calling off the right front*): Heigho!

PHEELIE: Heigho!

[A stout OLD NEGRESS, dressed in rough working clothes, comes in at the right. She carries a long heavy switch in her hand with which she cuts at the ground as she talks.

OLD WOMAN: How you all come on?



PHEELIE: Well as common, and how does you?

OLD WOMAN: Well, I thanky. I's looking my boy. Seen anything of him?

PHEELIE (*slowly*): What sort of boy?

OLD WOMAN: Lord, take me all day to given you a picture of him. He's just the no 'countest fellow ever was born. He goes 'round playing a harp, and he's not just right in his head. He talks wild about being off and travelling everywhere, and he ain't never been out'n Harnett County. Got all that mess out'n picture books and such.

[*A delighted grin begins to pass over ENOS' face. PHEELIE looks dejectedly at the ground.*]

PHEELIE (*in a choked voice*): I ain't seed him nowhere.

OLD WOMAN (*watching her closely*): I whipped him the other day 'cause he so sorry, and he run off. And when I catches him this time I's going to cure him for good and all. You say you ain't seed him?

PHEELIE (*looking up*): Naw'm.

OLD WOMAN (*eyeing her*): That's queer, I thought I seed somebody like him standing here in the yard. Last house down the road said he passed there a hour ago, and they ain't no road to turn off.

PHEELIE (*persistently*): Naw'm, I ain't seed him.

[*Unseen to PHEELIE, ENOS makes a signal to THE WOMAN that THE BOY is behind the house. Looking off.*]

Maybe he went by when we weren't looking.

[*THE WOMAN darts around the house and is heard crying out.*]

OLD WOMAN: Ah—hah—here you is. Here you is!

PHEELIE: How'd she find out he's there?

[*There is the sound of blows followed by loud crying.*]

ENOS: Listen at him cry, the baby!

PHEELIE (*who has started towards the rear*): Quit your laughing. (*She chokes with sobs.*) You set her on him, that's what you done. And I'll help him out, she shan't beat him so.



[*She meets THE OLD WOMAN coming in leading THE BOY by the collar. He is crying like a child.*]

OLD WOMAN (*yelling at him*): Dry up ! (*He stops his sobbing and looks off ashamed.*) Now ain't you a mess to be running off and leaving me all the cotton to chop ! (*Looking around her*) Well, we's got to be moving and I's going to give you a beating what is a beating when you gets home.

ENOS: Where you live ?

OLD WOMAN: Down near Dukes.

ENOS: Oh-ho, I thought maybe from your boy's talk you was from New York or the moon or somewhere.

OLD WOMAN: I be bound he's been lying to you. He can't tell the truth. The devil must a-got him in the dark of the moon. (*She brings the switch across his legs. He shouts with pain.*) Step on now !

[*He struggles against her and holds back.*]

BOY: Pheelie, Pheelie, help me, can't you ?

PHEELIE (*raising a face filled with wrath*): Help you ! That I won't. (*Coming up to him and glaring in his face*) You dirty stinking rascal, why you fool me so ?

OLD WOMAN (*giving him another cut*): You put a move on you or I'll frail the stuffing out'n you.

[*They move off towards the right front, he looking back and holding out his hands to PHEELIE.*]

BOY: Pheelie, don't turn against me so, Pheelie !

[*They go out.*]

ENOS (*going up to PHEELIE*): Honey, don't—don't be mad now. See, if it hadn't been for me, apt as not you'd a-let that little fool got you to going off with him.

[*PHEELIE bursts into wild sobs. He pulls her head against his breast, but she shakes herself from him. The loud voice of THE OLD WOMAN is heard outside.*]

OLD WOMAN: You get in that cart or I'll Pheelie you !

PHEELIE : I don't want—I ain't never going to speak to you again ! Oh, he's done gone ! (*She runs to the right and calls down the road*) Heigh, Boy ! Boy !

BOY (*his voice coming back high and faint*) : Pheelie-ee-ee.

[PHEELIE falls on the bench, sobbing in uncontrollable grief. ENOS stands looking at her with a wry smile while he gingerly rubs his bruised head. After a moment he goes over to her and puts his arms around her. They are still around her when

## THE CURTAIN FALLS



Edna St. Vincent Millay

ARIA DA CAPO

*A Play*

## CHARACTERS

PIERROT

COLUMBINE

COTHURNUS, MASQUE OF TRAGEDY

THYRSIS	}	shepherds
CORYDON		

*This play was first produced by THE PROVINCETOWN PLAYERS  
in NEW YORK CITY with the following cast:*

<i>Pierrot</i>	—	—	—	—	HARRISON DOWD
<i>Columbine</i>	—	—	—	—	NORMA MILLAY
<i>Cothurnus</i>	—	—	—	—	HUGH FERRISS
<i>Corydon</i>	—	—	—	—	CHARLES ELLIS
<i>Thyrsis</i>	—	—	—	—	JAMES LIGHT

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*The curtain rises on a stage set for a Harlequinade, a merry black and white interior. Directly behind the footlights, and running parallel with them, is a long table, covered with a gay black and white cloth, on which is spread a banquet. At the opposite ends of this table, seated on delicate thin-legged chairs with high backs, are PIERROT and COLUMBINE, dressed according to the tradition, excepting that PIERROT is in lilac, and COLUMBINE in pink. They are dining.*

COLUMBINE :

Pierrot, a macaroon ! I cannot live  
Without a macaroon !

PIERROT :

My only love,

You are so intense ! . . . Is it Tuesday, Columbine ?—  
I'll kiss you if it's Tuesday.

COLUMBINE :

It is Wednesday,

If you must know. . . . Is this my artichoke,  
Or yours ?

PIERROT :

Ah Columbine,—as if it mattered !

Wednesday. . . . Will it be Tuesday, then, to-morrow,  
By any chance ?

COLUMBINE :

To-morrow will be—Pierrot,

That isn't funny !

PIERROT :

I thought it rather nice.

Well, let us drink some wine and lose our heads  
And love each other.

COLUMBINE :

Pierrot, don't you love

Me now ?

PIERROT :

La, what a woman !—how should I know ?

Pour me some wine : I'll tell you presently.

COLUMBINE :

Pierrot, do you know, I think you drink too much.

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All applications for permission to perform this play should be made to the author's agents, Messrs. A. M. Heath and Company, Ltd., 188 Piccadilly, London, W.1 ; or, for Canada and the U.S.A., to the Baker International Play Bureau, 178 Tremont Street, Boston, Mass., or 448 South Hill Street, Los Angeles.

PIERROT:

Yes, I dare say I do. . . . Or else too little.  
 It's hard to tell. You see, I am always wanting  
 A little more than what I have,—or else  
 A little less. There's something wrong. My dear,  
 How many fingers have you?

COLUMBINE:

La, indeed,

How should I know?—It always takes me one hand  
 To count the other with. It's too confusing.  
 Why?

PIERROT: Why?—I am a student, Columbine;  
 And search into all matters.

COLUMBINE:

La, indeed?—

Count them yourself, then!

PIERROT:

No. Or, rather, *noy*.

'Tis of no consequence. . . . I am become  
 A painter, suddenly,—and you impress me—  
 Ah, yes!—six orange bull's-eyes, four green pin-  
 wheels,  
 And one magenta jelly-roll,—the title  
 As follows: *Woman Taking in Cheese from Fire-Escape*.

COLUMBINE:

Well, I like that! So that is all I've meant  
 To you!

PIERROT: Hush! All at once I am become

A pianist. I will imagine you in sound. . . .  
 On a new scale. . . . Without tonality. . . .  
*Vivace senza tempo senza tutto*. . . .

Title: *Uptown Express at Six o'clock*.  
 Pour me a drink.

COLUMBINE:

Pierrot, you work too hard.

You need a rest. Come on out into the garden,  
 And sing me something sad.

PIERROT:

Don't stand so near me!

I am become a socialist. I love  
 Humanity; but I hate people. Columbine,  
 Put on your mittens, child; your hands are cold.

COLUMBINE:

My hands are *not* cold !

PIERROT:

Oh, I am sure they are.  
And you must have a shawl to wrap about you,  
And sit by the fire.

COLUMBINE:

Why, I'll do no such thing !  
I'm hot as a spoon in a teacup !

PIERROT:

Columbine,  
I'm a philanthropist. I know I am,  
Because I feel so restless. Do not scream,  
Or it will be the worse for you !

COLUMBINE:

Pierrot,  
My vinaigrette ! I cannot *live* without  
My vinaigrette !

PIERROT:

My only love, you are  
So fundamental ! . . . How would you like to be  
An actress, Columbine ?—I am become  
Your manager.

COLUMBINE:

Why, Pierrot, I can't act.

PIERROT:

Can't act ! Can't act ! La, listen to the woman !  
What's that to do with the price of furs ?—  
You're blonde,  
Are you not ?—you have no education, have you ?—  
Can't act ! You under-rate yourself, my dear !

COLUMBINE:

Yes, I suppose I do.

PIERROT:

As for the rest,  
I'll teach you how to cry, and how to die,  
And other little tricks; and the house will love you.  
You'll be a star by five o'clock . . . that is,  
If you will let me pay for your apartment.

COLUMBINE:

Let you ?—well, that's a good one !  
Ha ! Ha ! Ha !  
But why ?

PIERROT:

But why ?—well, as to that, my dear,  
I cannot say. It's just a matter of form.

COLUMBINE :

Pierrot, I'm getting tired of caviar  
And peacocks' livers. Isn't there something else  
That people eat?—some humble vegetable,  
That grows in the ground?

PIERROT :

Well, there are mushrooms.

COLUMBINE :

Mushrooms !

That's so ! I had forgotten . . . mushrooms . . .  
mushrooms. . . .

I cannot *live* with. . . . How do you like this gown ?

PIERROT :

Not much. I'm tired of gowns that have the waist-line  
About the waist, and the hem around the bottom,—  
And women with their breasts in front of them !—  
*Zut and ehè !* Where does one go from here !

COLUMBINE :

Here's a persimmon, love. You always liked them.

PIERROT :

I am become a critic ; there is nothing  
I can enjoy. . . . However, set it aside ;  
I'll eat it between meals.

COLUMBINE :

Pierrot, do you know,  
Sometimes I think you're making fun of me.

PIERROT :

My love, by yon black moon, you wrong us both.

COLUMBINE :

There isn't a sign of a moon, Pierrot.

PIERROT :

Of course not.

There never was. " Moon's " just a word to swear by.  
" Mutton ! "—now *there's* a thing you can lay the  
hands on,  
And set the tooth in ! Listen, Columbine :  
I always lied about the moon and you.  
Food is my only lust.

COLUMBINE :

Well, eat it, then,  
For Heaven's sake, and stop your silly noise !  
I haven't heard the clock tick for an hour.

PIERROT:

It's ticking all the same. If you were a fly,  
You would be dead by now. And if I were a parrot,  
I could be talking for a thousand years !

[Enter COTHURNUS.

PIERROT:

Hello, what's this, for God's sake ?—What's the matter ?  
Say, whadda you mean ?—get off the stage, my  
friend,  
And pinch yourself,—you're walking in your sleep !

COTHURNUS:

I never sleep.

PIERROT:

Well, anyhow, clear out.

You don't belong on here. Wait for your own scene !  
Whadda you think this is,—a dress-rehearsal ?

COTHURNUS:

Sir, I am tired of waiting. I will wait  
No longer.

PIERROT:

Well, but whadda you going to do ?

The scene is set for me !

COTHURNUS:

True, sir; yet I

Can play the scene.

PIERROT:

Your scene is down for later !

COTHURNUS:

That, too, is true, sir; but I play it now.

PIERROT:

Oh, very well !—Anyway, I am tired  
Of black and white. At least, I think I am.

[Exit COLUMBINE.

Yes, I am sure I am. I know what I'll do !—  
I'll go and strum the moon, that's what I'll do. . . .  
Unless, perhaps . . . you never can tell. . . . I may be,  
You know, tired of the moon. Well, anyway,  
I'll go find Columbine. . . . And when I find her,  
I will address her thus: "*Ehè, Pierrette !*"—  
There's something in that.

[Exit PIERROT.





COTHURNUS:

Play the play !

[CORYDON and THYRSIS move the table and chairs to one side out of the way, and seat themselves in a half-reclining position on the floor.]

THYRSIS:

How gently in the silence, Corydon,  
Our sheep go up the bank. They crop a grass  
That's yellow where the sun is out, and black  
Where the clouds drag their shadows. Have you  
noticed  
How steadily, yet with what a slanting eye  
They graze ?

CORYDON:

As if they thought of other things.  
What say you, Thyrsis, do they only question  
Where next to pull ?—Or do their far minds draw  
them  
Thus vaguely north of west and south of east ?

THYRSIS:

One cannot say. . . . The black lamb wears its burdocks  
As if they were a garland,—have you noticed ?  
Purple and white—and drinks the bitten grass  
As if it were a wine.

CORYDON:

I've noticed that.  
What say you, Thyrsis, shall we make a song  
About a lamb that thought himself a shepherd ?

THYRSIS:

Why, yes !—that is, why,—no. (I have forgotten my  
line.)

COTHURNUS (*prompting*):

" I know a game worth two of that."

THYRSIS:

Oh, yes. . . . I know a game worth two of that !  
Let's gather rocks, and build a wall between us ;  
And say that over there belongs to me,  
And over here to you !

CORYDON:

Why,—very well.  
And say you may not come upon my side  
Unless I say you may !

THYRSIS: Nor you on mine !  
And if you should, 'twould be the worse for you !

[*They weave a wall of coloured crêpe paper ribbons from the centre front to the centre back of the stage, fastening the ends to COLUMBINE's chair in front and to PIERROT's chair in the back.*]

CORYDON:  
Now there's a wall a man may see across,  
But not attempt to scale.

THYRSIS: An excellent wall.

CORYDON:  
Come, let us separate, and sit alone  
A little while, and lay a plot whereby  
We may outdo each other.

[*They seat themselves on opposite sides of the wall.*]

PIERROT (*off stage*): Ehè, Pierrette !

COLUMBINE (*off stage*):  
My name is Columbine ! Leave me alone !

THYRSIS (*coming up to the wall*):  
Corydon, after all, and in spite of the fact  
I started it myself, I do not like this  
So very much. What is the sense of saying  
I do not want you on my side the wall ?  
It is a silly game. I'd much prefer  
Making the little song you spoke of making,  
About the lamb, you know, that thought himself  
A shepherd !—what do you say ?

[*Pause.*]

CORYDON (*at wall*):  
(I have forgotten the line.)

COTHURNUS (*prompting*):  
“ How do I know this isn't a trick ? ”

CORYDON:  
Oh, yes. . . . How do I know this isn't a trick  
To get upon my land ?

THYRSIS: Oh, Corydon,  
You *know* it's not a trick. I do not like  
The game, that's all. Come over here, or let me  
Come over there.

CORYDON:                   It is a clever trick  
To get upon my land.

*[Seats himself as before.]*

THYRSIS:                   Oh, very well !

*[Seats himself as before. To himself:]*

I think I never knew a sillier game.

CORYDON (*coming to wall*):

Oh, Thyrsis, just a minute !—all the water  
Is on your side the wall, and the sheep are thirsty.  
I hadn't thought of that.

THYRSIS:                   Oh, hadn't you ?

CORYDON:

Why, what do you mean ?

THYRSIS:                   What do I mean ?—I mean

That I can play a game as well as you can.  
And if the pool is on my side, it's on  
My side, that's all.

CORYDON:                   You mean you'd let the sheep  
Go thirsty ?

THYRSIS:                   Well, they're not my sheep. My sheep  
Have water enough.

CORYDON:                   Your sheep ! You are mad, to call them  
Yours—mine—they are all one flock ! Thyrsis, you  
can't mean

To keep the water from them, just because  
They happened to be grazing over here  
Instead of over there, when we set the wall up ?

THYRSIS:

Oh, can't I ?—wait and see !—and if you try,  
To lead them over here, you'll wish you hadn't !

CORYDON:

I wonder how it happens all the water  
Is on your side. . . . I'll say you had an eye out  
For lots of little things, my innocent friend,  
When I said, " Let us make a song," and you said,  
" I know a game worth two of that ! "

COLUMBINE (*off stage*): Pierrot,  
 D'you know, I think you must be getting old,  
 Or fat, or something,—stupid, anyway !—  
 Can't you put on some other kind of collar ?

THYRSIS:  
 You know as well as I do, Corydon,  
 I never thought anything of the kind.  
*Don't you ?*

CORYDON: *I do not.*

THYRSIS: *Don't you ?*

CORYDON: Oh, I suppose so.  
 Thyrsis, let's drop this,—what do you say ?—it's only  
 A game, you know . . . we seem to be forgetting  
 It's only a game . . . a pretty serious game  
 It's getting to be, when one of us is willing  
 To let the sheep go thirsty for the sake of it.

THYRSIS:  
 I know it, Corydon.

[*They reach out their arms to each other across the wall.*]

COTHURNUS (*prompting*): “ But how do I know—— ”

THYRSIS:  
 Oh, yes. . . . But how do I know this isn't a trick  
 To water your sheep, and get the laugh on me ?

CORYDON:  
 You can't know, that's the difficult thing about it,  
 Of course,—you can't be sure. You have to take  
 My word for it. And I know just how you feel.  
 But one of us has to take a risk, or else,  
 Why, don't you see ?—the game goes on forever ! . . .  
 It's terrible, when you stop to think of it. . . .  
 Oh, Thyrsis, now for the first time I feel  
 This wall is actually a wall, a thing  
 Come up between us, shutting you away  
 From me. . . . I do not know you any more !

THYRSIS:  
 No, don't say that ! Oh, Corydon, I'm willing  
 To drop it all, if you will ! Come on over  
 And water your sheep ! It is an ugly game.  
 I hated it from the first. . . . How did it start ?



CORYDON:

I do not know . . . I do not know . . . I think  
I am afraid of you !—you are a stranger !  
I never set eyes on you before ! “ Come over  
And water my sheep,” indeed !—They’ll be more thirsty  
Than they are now before I bring them over  
Into your land, and have you mixing them up  
With yours, and calling them yours, and trying to  
keep them !

[Enter COLUMBINE.

COLUMBINE (*to* COTHURNUS):

Glummy, I want my hat.

THYRSIS:

Take it, and go.

COLUMBINE:

Take it and go, indeed ! Is it my hat,  
Or isn’t it ? Is this my scene, or not ?  
Take it and go ! Really, you know, you two  
Are awfully funny !

[Exit COLUMBINE.

THYRSIS:

Corydon, my friend,  
I’m going to leave you now, and whittle me  
A pipe, or sing a song, or go to sleep.  
When you have come to your senses, let me know.

[Goes back to where he has been sitting, lies down and sleeps.

CORYDON, *in going back to where he has been sitting, stumbles  
over bowl of coloured confetti and coloured paper ribbons.*

CORYDON:

Why, what is this ?—Red stones—and purple stones—  
And stones stuck full of gold !—The ground is full  
Of gold and coloured stones ! . . . I’m glad the wall  
Was up before I found them !—Otherwise,  
I should have had to share them. As it is,  
They all belong to me. . . . Unless—

[He goes to wall and digs up and down the length of it, to see  
if there are jewels on the other side.

None here—

None here—none here—They all belong to me !

[Sits.

THYRSIS (*awakening*):

How curious ! I thought the little black lamb  
Came up and licked my hair ; I saw the wool  
About its neck as plain as anything !  
It must have been a dream. The little black lamb  
Is on the other side of the wall, I'm sure.

[*Goes to wall and looks over. CORYDON is seated on the ground, tossing the confetti up into the air and catching it.*

Hello, what's that you've got there, Corydon ?

CORYDON:

Jewels.

THYRSIS: Jewels ?—And where did you ever get them ?

CORYDON:

Oh, over here.

THYRSIS: You mean to say you found them,  
By digging around in the ground for them ?

CORYDON (*unpleasantly*):

No, Thyrsis,

By digging down for water for my sheep.

THYRSIS:

Corydon, come to the wall a minute, will you ?  
I want to talk to you.

CORYDON:

I haven't time.

I'm making me a necklace of red stones.

THYRSIS:

I'll give you all the water that you want,  
For one of those red stones,—if it's a good one.

CORYDON:

Water ?—what for ?—what do I want of water ?

THYRSIS:

Why, for your sheep !

CORYDON:

My sheep ?—I'm not a shepherd !

THYRSIS:

Your sheep are dying of thirst.

CORYDON:

Man, haven't I told you

I can't be bothered with a few untidy

Brown sheep all full of burdocks ?—I'm a merchant.

That's what I am !—And if I set my mind to it  
 I dare say I could be an emperor !  
 (*To himself*) Wouldn't I be a fool to spend my time  
 Watching a flock of sheep go up a hill,  
 When I have these to play with ?—when I have these  
 To think about ?—I can't make up my mind  
 Whether to buy a city, and have a thousand  
 Beautiful girls to bathe me, and be happy  
 Until I die, or build a bridge, and name it  
 The Bridge of Corydon,—and be remembered  
 After I'm dead.

THYRSIS: Corydon, come to the wall,  
 Won't you ?—I want to tell you something.

CORYDON: Hush !  
 Be off ! Be off ! Go finish your nap, I tell you !

THYRSIS:  
 Corydon, listen: if you don't want your sheep,  
 Give them to me.

CORYDON: Be off ! Go finish your nap.  
 A red one—and a blue one—and a red one—  
 And a purple one—give you my sheep, did you say ?—  
 Come, come ! What do you take me for, a fool ?  
 I've a lot of thinking to do,—and while I'm thinking,  
 The sheep might just as well be over here  
 As over there. . . . A blue one—and a red one—

THYRSIS:  
 But they will die !

CORYDON: And a green one—and a couple  
 Of white ones, for a change.

THYRSIS: Maybe I have  
 Some jewels on my side.

CORYDON: And another green one—  
 Maybe, but I don't think so. You see, this rock  
 Isn't so very wide. It stops before  
 It gets to the wall. It seems to go quite deep,  
 However.

THYRSIS (*with hatred*): I see.

COLUMBINE (*off stage*):  
 Look, Pierrot, there's the moon !

PIERROT (*off stage*):  
Nonsense!

THYRSIS: I see.

COLUMBINE (*off stage*): Sing me an old song, Pierrot,—  
Something I can remember.

PIERROT (*off stage*): Columbine.  
Your mind is made of crumbs,—like an escallop  
Of oysters,—first a layer of crumbs, and then  
An oyster taste, and then a layer of crumbs.

THYRSIS (*searching*):  
I find no jewels . . . but I wonder what  
The root of this black weed would do to a man  
If he should taste it . . . I have seen a sheep die,  
With half the stalk still drooling from its mouth.  
'Twould be a speedy remedy, I should think,  
For a festered pride and a feverish ambition.  
It has a curious root. I think I'll hack it  
In little pieces . . . First I'll get me a drink;  
And then I'll hack that root in little pieces  
As small as dust, and see what the colour is  
Inside.

[*Goes to bowl on floor.*

The pool is very clear. I see  
A shepherd standing on the brink, with a red cloak  
About him, and a black weed in his hand. . . .  
'Tis I.

[*Kneels and drinks.*

CORYDON (*coming to wall*):  
Hello, what are you doing, Thyrsis?

THYRSIS:  
Digging for gold.

CORYDON: I'll give you all the gold  
You want, if you'll give me a bowl of water.  
If you don't want too much, that is to say.

THYRSIS:  
Ho, so you've changed your mind?—It's different,  
Isn't it, when you want a drink yourself?

CORYDON:

Of course it is.

THYRSIS:

Well, let me see . . . a bowl

Of water,—come back in an hour, Corydon.

I'm busy now.

CORYDON:

Oh, Thyrsis, give me a bowl

Of water !—and I'll fill the bowl with jewels,

And bring it back !

THYRSIS:

Be off, I'm busy now.

*[He catches sight of the weed, picks it up and looks at it, unseen by CORYDON.]*

Wait !—Pick me out the finest stones you have . . .

I'll bring you a drink of water presently.

CORYDON *(goes back and sits down, with the jewels before him)*:

A bowl of jewels is a lot of jewels.

THYRSIS *(chopping up the weed)*:

I wonder if it has a bitter taste.

CORYDON:

There's sure to be a stone or two among them

I have grown fond of, pouring them from one hand

Into the other.

THYRSIS:

I hope it doesn't taste

Too bitter, just at first.

CORYDON:

A bowl of jewels

Is far too many jewels to give away

And not get back again.

THYRSIS:

I don't believe

He'll notice. He's too thirsty. He'll gulp it down

And never notice.

CORYDON:

There ought to be some way

To get them back again. . . . I could give him a necklace,

And snatch it back, after I'd drunk the water,

I suppose . . . Why, as for that, of course, a necklace . . .

*[He puts two or three of the coloured tapes together and tries their strength by pulling them, after which he puts them around his neck and pulls them, gently, nodding to himself. He gets up and goes to the wall, with the coloured tapes in his hands.]*



THYRSIS *in the meantime has poured the powdered root—black confetti—into the pot which contained the flower and filled it up with wine from the punch-bowl on the floor. He comes to the wall at the same time, holding the bowl of poison.*

THYRSIS:

Come, get your bowl of water, Corydon.

CORYDON:

Ah, very good !—and for such a gift as that  
I'll give you more than a bowl of unset stones.  
I'll give you three long necklaces, my friend.  
Come closer. Here they are.

*[Puts the ribbons about THYRSIS' neck.]*

THYRSIS *(putting bowl to CORYDON's mouth)*:

I'll hold the bowl

Until you've drunk it all.

CORYDON:

Then hold it steady.

For every drop you spill I'll have a stone back  
Out of this chain.

THYRSIS:

I shall not spill a drop.

*[CORYDON drinks, meanwhile beginning to strangle THYRSIS.]*

THYRSIS:

Don't pull the string so tight.

CORYDON:

You're spilling the water.

THYRSIS:

You've had enough—you've had enough—stop pulling  
The string so tight !

CORYDON:

Why, that's not tight at all . . .

How's this ?

THYRSIS *(drops bowl)*:

You're strangling me ! Oh, Corydon !

It's only a game !—and you are strangling me !

CORYDON:

It's only a game, is it !—Yet I believe  
You've poisoned me in earnest !

*[Writhes and pulls the strings tighter, winding them about THYRSIS' neck.]*

THYRSIS:

Corydon !

[Dies.

CORYDON:

You've poisoned me in earnest. . . . I feel so cold. . . .  
 So cold . . . this is a very silly game. . . .  
 Why do we play it ?—let's not play this game  
 A minute more . . . let's make a little song  
 About a lamb . . . I'm coming over the wall,  
 No matter what you say,—I want to be near you. . . .

*[Groping his way, with arms wide before him, he strides through the frail papers of the wall without knowing it, and continues seeking for the wall straight across the stage.]*

Where is the wall ?

*[Gropes his way back, and stands very near THYRSIS without seeing him; he speaks slowly.]*

There isn't any wall, I think.

*[Takes a step forward, his foot touches THYRSIS' body, and he falls down beside him.]*

Thyrsis, where is your cloak ?—just give me  
 A little bit of your cloak ! . . .

*[Draws corner of THYRSIS' cloak over his shoulders, falls across THYRSIS' body, and dies.]*

COTHURNUS closes the prompt-book with a bang, arises matter-of-factly, comes down stage, and places the table over the two bodies, drawing down the cover so that they are hidden from any actors on the stage, but visible to the audience, pushing in their feet and hands with his boot. He then turns his back to the audience, and claps his hands twice.

COTHURNUS:

Strike the scene !

[Exit COTHURNUS.

Enter PIERROT and COLUMBINE.

PIERROT:

Don't puff so, Columbine !

BBP



COLUMBINE: Lord, what a mess  
 This set is in ! If there's one thing I hate  
 Above everything else,—even more than getting my  
 feet wet—  
 It's clutter !—He might at least have left the scene  
 The way he found it . . . don't you say so, Pierrot ?  
*[She picks up punch bowl. They arrange chairs as before at ends of table.]*

PIERROT:  
 Well, I don't know. I think it rather diverting  
 The way it is.  
*[Yawns, picks up confetti bowl.]*

Shall we begin ?

COLUMBINE (*screams*): My God !  
 What's that there under the table ?

PIERROT: It is the bodies  
 Of the two shepherds from the other play.

COLUMBINE (*slowly*):  
 How curious to strangle him like that,  
 With coloured paper ribbons.

PIERROT: Yes, and yet  
 I dare say he is just as dead.  
*[Pauses. Calls:]*

Cothurnus !  
 Come drag these bodies out of here ! We can't  
 Sit down and eat with two dead bodies lying  
 Under the table ! . . . The audience wouldn't stand  
 for it !

COTHURNUS (*off stage*):  
 What makes you think so ?—Pull down the tablecloth  
 On the other side, and hide them from the house,  
 And play the farce. The audience will forget.

PIERROT:  
 That's so. Give me a hand there, Columbine.

*[PIERROT and COLUMBINE pull down the table cover in such a way that the two bodies are hidden from the house, then merrily set their bowls back on the table, draw up their chairs, and begin the play exactly as before.]*

COLUMBINE :

Pierrot, a macaroon,—I cannot *live*  
Without a macaroon !

PIERROT :

My only love,

You are *so* intense ! . . . Is it Tuesday, Columbine ?—

I'll kiss you if it's Tuesday.

*[Curtains begin to close slowly.]*

COLUMBINE :

It is Wednesday.

If you must know . . . Is this my artichoke

Or yours ?

PIERROT :

Ah, Columbine, as if it mattered!

Wednesday. . . . Will it be Tuesday, then, to-morrow,

By any chance ? . . .

CURTAIN





Eugene O'Neill

BEFORE BREAKFAST

*A Play*

## CHARACTERS

MRS. ROWLAND

ALFRED ROWLAND (off stage)

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SCENE: *A small room serving both as kitchen and dining-room in a flat in Christopher Street, New York City. In the rear, to the R., a door leading to the outer hall. On the L. of the doorway, a sink, and a two-burner gas stove. Over the stove, and extending to the L. wall, a wooden cupboard for dishes, etc. On the L. two windows looking out on a fire-escape, where several potted plants are dying of neglect. Before the windows, a table covered with oilcloth. Two cane-bottomed chairs are placed by the table. Another stands against the wall to the R. of door in rear. In the R. wall, rear, a doorway leading to a bedroom. Farther forward, different articles of a man's and a woman's clothing are hung on pegs. A clothes-line is strung from the L. corner, rear, to the R. wall, forward.*

*It is about 8.30 in the morning of a fine, sunshiny day in the early autumn.*

MRS. ROWLAND *enters from the bedroom, yawning, her hands still busy putting the finishing touches on a slovenly toilet by sticking hairpins into her hair, which is bunched up into a drab-coloured mass on top of her round head. She is of medium height and inclined to a shapeless stoutness, accentuated by her formless blue dress, shabby and worn. Her face is characterless, with small, regular features and eyes of a nondescript blue. There is a pinched expression about her eyes and nose and her weak, spiteful mouth. She is in her early twenties, but looks much older.*

*She comes into the middle of the room and yawns, stretching her arms to their full length. Her drowsy eyes stare about the room with the irritated look of one to whom a long sleep has not been a long rest. She goes wearily to the clothes hanging on the R., and takes an apron from a hook. She ties it about her waist, giving vent to an exasperated "Damn!" when the knot fails to obey her clumsy fingers. Finally gets it tied and goes slowly to the gas stove and lights one burner. She fills the coffee-pot at the sink and sets it over the flame. Then slumps down into a chair by the table and puts a hand over her forehead as if she were suffering from*

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headache. Suddenly her face brightens as though she had remembered something, and she casts a quick glance at the dish cupboard; then looks sharply at the bedroom door and listens intently for a moment or so.

MRS. ROWLAND (in a low voice): Alfred ! Alfred ! (There is no answer from the next room and she continues suspiciously in a louder tone) You needn't pretend you're asleep.

[There is no reply to this from the bedroom and, reassured, she gets up from her chair and tiptoes cautiously to the dish cupboard. She slowly opens one door, taking great care to make no noise, and slides out from their hiding-place behind the dishes a bottle of Gordon's gin and a glass. In doing so, she disturbs the top dish, which rattles a little. At this sound, she starts guiltily and looks with sulky defiance at the doorway to the next room.

(Her voice trembling): Alfred !

[After a pause, during which she listens for any sound, she takes the glass and pours out a large drink and gulps it down; then hastily returns the bottle and glass to their hiding-place. She closes the cupboard door with the same care as she had opened it, and, heaving a sigh of great relief, sinks down into her chair again. The large dose of alcohol she has taken has an almost immediate effect. Her features become more animated, she seems to gather energy, and she looks at the bedroom door with a hard, vindictive smile on her lips. Her eyes glance quickly about the room and are fixed on a man's coat and waistcoat which hang from a hook at R. She moves stealthily over to the open doorway and stands there, out of sight of anyone inside, listening for any movement.

(Calling in a half-whisper): Alfred !

[Again there is no reply. With a swift movement she takes the coat and waistcoat from the hook and returns with them to her chair. She sits down and takes the various articles out of each pocket, but quickly puts them back again. At last, in the inside pocket of the vest, she finds a letter.

(Looking at the handwriting—slowly to herself): Hmm ! I knew it !

[She opens the letter and reads it. At first her expression is one of hatred and rage, but as she goes on to the end, it changes to one of triumphant malignity. She remains in deep thought for a moment, staring before her, the letter in her hands, a cruel smile on her lips. Then she puts the letter back in the pocket of the waistcoat, and

*still careful not to awaken the sleeper, hangs the clothes up again on the same hook, and goes to the bedroom door and looks in.*

*(In a loud, shrill voice)* : Alfred ! *(Still louder)* Alfred !

*[There is a muffled, yawning groan from the next room.]*

Don't you think it's about time you got up ? Do you want to stay in bed all day ? *(Turning around and coming back to her chair)* Not that I've any doubts about your being lazy enough to stay in bed for ever. *(She sits down and looks out of the window, irritably.)* Goodness knows what time it is. We haven't even got any way of telling the time since you pawned your watch like a fool. The last valuable thing we had, and you knew it. It's been nothing but pawn, pawn, pawn with you—anything to put off getting a job, anything to get out of going to work like a man. *(She taps the floor with her foot nervously, biting her lips. After a short pause)* Alfred ! Get up, do you hear me ? I want to make that bed before I go out. I'm sick of having this place in a continual mess on your account. *(With a certain vindictive satisfaction)* Not that we'll be here long unless you manage to get some money somehow. Heaven knows I do my part—and more—going out to sew every day while you play the gentleman and loaf around bar-rooms with that good-for-nothing lot of artists from the Square.

*[A short pause, during which she plays nervously with a cup and saucer on the table.]*

And where are you going to get money, I'd like to know ? The rent's due this week, and you know what the landlord is. He won't let us stay a minute over our time. You say you *can't* get a job. That's a lie, and you know it. You never even look for one. All you do is moon around all day writing silly poetry and stories that no one will buy—and no wonder they won't. I notice I can always get a position, such as it is ; and it's only that which keeps us from starving to death.

*[Gets up and goes over to the stove, looks into the coffee-pot to see if the water is boiling, then comes back and sits down again.]*

You'll have to get money to-day somehow. I can't do it all, and I won't do it all. You've got to come to your senses. You've got to beg, borrow or steal it somewheres. *(With a contemptuous laugh)* But where, I'd like to know ? You're too



proud to beg, and you've borrowed the limit, and you haven't the nerve to steal. (*After a pause, getting up angrily*) Aren't you up yet, for heaven's sake? It's just like you to go to sleep again, or pretend to. (*She goes to the bedroom door and looks in.*) Oh, you are up. Well, it's about time. You needn't look at me like that. Your airs don't fool me a bit any more. I know you too well—better than you think I do—you and your goings-on. (*Turning away from the door, meaningly*) I know a lot of things, my dear. Never mind what I know now. I'll tell you before I go, you needn't worry.

[*She comes to the middle of the room and stands there, frowning. (Irritably)*: Hmm! I suppose I might as well get breakfast ready—not that there's anything much to get. (*Questioningly*) Unless you have some money? (*She pauses for an answer from the next room, which does not come.*) Foolish question! (*She gives a short, hard laugh.*) I ought to know you better than that by this time. When you left here in such a huff last night I knew what would happen. You can't be trusted for a second. A nice condition you came home in! The fight we had was only an excuse for you to make a beast of yourself. What was the use pawning your watch if all you wanted with the money was to waste it in buying drink?

[*Goes over to the dish cupboard and takes out plates, cups, etc., while she is talking.*

Hurry up! It don't take long to get breakfast these days, thanks to you. All we got this morning is bread and butter and coffee; and you wouldn't even have that if it wasn't for me sewing my fingers off.

[*She slams the loaf of bread on the table with a bang.*

The bread's stale. I hope you'll like it. You don't deserve any better, but I don't see why I should suffer. (*Going over to the stove*) The coffee'll be ready in a minute, and you needn't expect me to wait for you. (*Suddenly with great anger*) What on earth are you doing all this time? (*She goes over to the door and looks in.*) Well, you're almost dressed, at any rate. I expected to find you back in bed. That'd be just like you. How awful you look this morning! For heaven's sake, shave! You're disgusting! You look like a tramp. No wonder no one will give you a job. I don't blame them—

when you don't even look half-way decent. (*She goes to the stove.*) There's plenty of hot water right here. You've got no excuse. (*Gets a bowl and pours some of the water from the coffee-pot into it.*) Here.

*[He stretches his hand into the room for it. It is a sensitive hand with slender fingers. It trembles and some of the water spills on the floor.]*

(*Tauntingly*): Look at your hand tremble ! You'd better give up drinking. You can't stand it. It's just your kind that get the D.Ts. *That would be the last straw !* (*Looking down at the floor*) Look at the mess you've made of this floor—cigarette ends and ashes all over the place. Why can't you put them on a plate ? No, you wouldn't be considerate enough to do that. You never think of me. You don't have to sweep the room and that's all you care about.

*[Takes the broom and commences to sweep viciously, raising a cloud of dust. From the inner room comes the sound of a razor being stropped.]*

(*Sweeping*) : Hurry up ! It must be nearly time for me to go. If I'm late, I'm liable to lose my position, and then I couldn't support you any longer. (*As an afterthought, she adds sarcastically*) And then you'd have to go to work or something dreadful like that. (*Sweeping under the table*) What I want to know is whether you're going to look for a job to-day or not. You know your family won't help us any more. They've had enough of you, too. (*After a moment's silent sweeping*) I'm about sick of all this life. I've a good notion to go home, if I wasn't too proud to let them know what a failure you've been—you, the millionaire Rowland's only son, the Harvard graduate, the poet, the catch of the town. Huh ! (*With bitterness*) There wouldn't be many of them now envy my catch if they knew the truth. What has our marriage been, I'd like to know ? Even before your millionaire father died owing everyone in the world money, you certainly never wasted any of your time on your wife. I suppose you thought I'd ought to be glad you were honourable enough to marry me—after getting me into trouble. You were ashamed of me with your fine friends because my father's only a grocer—that's what you were. At least he's honest, which is more than anyone could say about yours.

*[She is sweeping steadily towards the door. Leans on her broom for a moment.]*

You hoped everyone'd think you'd been forced to marry me, and pity you, didn't you? You didn't hesitate much about telling me you loved me, and making me believe your lies, before it happened, did you? You made me think you didn't want your father to buy me off as he tried to do. I know better now. I haven't lived with you all this time for nothing. (*Sombrely*) It's lucky the poor thing was born dead, after all. What a father you'd have been!

*[Is silent, brooding moodily for a moment. Then she continues with a sort of savage joy:]*

But I'm not the only one who's got you to thank for being unhappy. There's one other, at least, and *she* can't hope to marry you now. (*She puts her head into the next room.*) How about Helen?

*[She starts back from the doorway, half frightened.]*

Don't look at me that way! Yes, I read her letter. What about it? I got a right to. I'm your wife. And I know all there is to know, so don't lie. You needn't stare at me so. You can't bully me with your superior airs any longer. Only for me you'd be going without breakfast this very morning. (*She sets the broom back in the corner—whiningly*) You never did have any gratitude for what I've done. (*She comes to the stove and puts the coffee into the pot.*) The coffee's ready. I'm not going to wait for you.

*[She sits down in her chair again.]*

(*After a pause—puts her hand to her head—fretfully*): My head aches so this morning. It's a shame I've got to go to work in a stuffy room all day in my condition. And I wouldn't if you were half a man. By rights I ought to be lying on my back instead of you. You know how sick I've been this last year; and yet you object when I take a little something to keep up my spirits. You even didn't want me to take that tonic I got at the drug-store. (*With a hard laugh*) I know you'd be glad to have me dead and out of your way; then you'd be free to run after all these silly girls that think you're such a wonderful, misunderstood person—this Helen and the others.

[*There is a sharp exclamation of pain from the next room.*

(*With satisfaction*): There ! I knew you'd cut yourself. It'll be a lesson to you. You know you oughtn't to be running around nights drinking with your nerves in such an awful shape.

[*She goes to the door and looks in.*

What makes you so pale ? What are you staring at yourself in the mirror for ? For goodness sake, wipe that blood off your face ! (*With a shudder*) It's horrible ! (*In relieved tones*) There, that's better. I never could stand the sight of blood. (*She shrinks back from the door a little.*) You better give up trying and go to a barber shop. Your hand shakes dreadfully. Why do you stare at me like that ? (*She turns away from the door.*) Are you still mad at me about that letter ? (*Defiantly*) Well, I had a right to read it. I'm your wife.

[*She comes to the chair and sits down again. After a pause:*

I knew all the time you were running around with someone. Your lame excuses about spending the time at the library didn't fool me. Who is this Helen, anyway ? One of those artists ? Or does she write poetry, too ? Her letter sounds that way. I'll bet she told you your things were the best ever, and you believed her, like a fool. Is she young and pretty ? I was young and pretty, too, when you fooled me with your fine, poetic talk ; but life with you would soon wear anyone down. What I've been through !

[*Goes over and takes the coffee off the stove.*

Breakfast is ready. (*With a contemptuous glance*) Breakfast ! (*Pours out a cup of coffee for herself and puts the pot on the table.*) Your coffee'll be cold. What are you doing—still shaving, for heaven's sake ? You'd better give it up. One of these mornings you'll give yourself a serious cut.

[*She cuts off bread and butters it. During the following speeches she eats and sips her coffee:*

I'll have to run as soon as I've finished eating. One of us has got to work. (*Angrily*) Are you going to look for a job to-day or aren't you ? I should think some of your fine friends would help you, if they really think you're so much. But I guess they just like to hear you talk.



*[Sits in silence for a moment.]*

I'm sorry for this Helen, whoever she is. Haven't you got any feelings for other people? What will her family say? I see she mentions them in her letter. What is she going to do—have the child—or go to one of those doctors? That's a nice thing, I must say. Where can she get the money? Is she rich?

*[She waits for some answer to this volley of questions.]*

Hmm! You won't tell me anything about her, will you? Much I care. Come to think of it, I'm not so sorry for her after all. She knew what she was doing. She isn't any school-girl, like I was, from the looks of her letter. Does she know you're married? Of course, she must. All your friends know about your unhappy marriage. I know they pity you, but they don't know my side of it. They'd talk different if they did.

*[Too busy eating to go on for a second or so.]*

This Helen must be a fine one, if she knew you were married. What does she expect, then? That I'll divorce you and let her marry you? Does she think I'm crazy enough for that—after all you've made me go through? I guess not! And you can't get a divorce from me and you know it. No one can say *I've* ever done anything wrong.

*[Drinks the last of her cup of coffee.]*

She deserves to suffer, that's all I can say. I'll tell you what I think. I think your Helen is no better than a common street-walker, that's what I think.

*[There is a stifled groan of pain from the next room.]*

Did you cut yourself again? Serves you right. *(Gets up and takes off her apron.)* Well, I've got to run along. *(Peevishly)* This is a fine life for me to be leading! I won't stand for your loafing any longer. *(Something catches her ear and she pauses and listens intently.)* There! You've overturned the water all over everything. Don't say you haven't. I can hear it dripping on the floor. *(A vague expression of fear comes over her face.)* Alfred! Why don't you answer me?

*[She moves slowly toward the room. There is the noise of a chair being overturned and something crashes heavily to the floor. She stands, trembling with fright.]*



Alfred ! Alfred ! Answer me ! What is it you knocked over ? Are you still drunk ?

*[Unable to stand the position a second longer, she rushes to the door of the bedroom.]*

Alfred !

*[She stands in the doorway looking down at the floor of the inner room, transfixed with horror. Then she shrieks wildly and runs to the outer door, unlocks it and frenziedly pulls it open, and runs shrieking madly into the outer hall.]*

THE CURTAIN FALLS



Percival Wilde

ORDEAL BY BATTLE

*A Play Without a Hero*

## CHARACTERS

TOMAS

GRIGOR

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES

NORIA

GENERAL MALKOWSKY

JOVAN II - King

JIM

TONY

AN AMBASSADOR

A MILITARY ATTACHÉ

PROFESSOR LOVEN

*The time is the present; the action takes place in Talaveria.*

*The play first appeared in "The One-Act Play Magazine"  
(Contemporary Play Publications, 112 West 42nd Street, New  
York City), June-July, 1938.*

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*The scene is a room in a palace. The place is Talaveria, the capital of one of the smaller Balkan succession states.*

*The room is a large one. At the left, a great French window opens upon a balcony. It is here, we presume, that the King shows himself to his devoted subjects. At the back an archway opens on a hall. At the right a small door opens into another room.*

*The furnishings are massive and in good taste. Paintings and statues are here and there—none too conspicuous. A telephone is on a console left of the archway. One group of objects, however, stands out prominently, possibly because it is so emphatically out of place, and that is a good-sized four-legged table, covered with a plain white cloth, on which stand side by side two glass cages resembling small aquaria. Glass tubing and nickel-plated machinery are in evidence on the table, apparently attached to the cages; and in each of the latter is a white mouse, one of which is active, and scurries about, while the other is motionless. The sight is so arresting that for a few seconds we pay more attention to the mice than to the two Talaverian SENTRIES who lounge at the arch, bayoneted rifles in hand. Then we glance at them and comment that they are distinctly unsoldierly, for one of them, with doleful face, seems ready to weep into the barrel of his rifle, while the other is furtively smoking a cigarette, hiding it in the palm of his hand between puffs, and occasionally peering down the hall.*

THE FIRST SENTRY (TOMAS): I don't care what anybody thinks, I'm sorry for him.

THE SECOND SENTRY (GRIGOR): Sorry for who?

TOMAS: Otto.

GRIGOR: Pooh.

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All applications for permission to perform this play must be made to Messrs. Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2; or, for South Africa, to Messrs. Samuel French, Ltd., P.O. Box 497, Nairobi; or, for Canada, to Messrs. Samuel French (Canada), Ltd., 480 University Avenue, Toronto; or, for the U.S.A., to Messrs. Samuel French, Inc., 25 West 45th Street, New York City, or 811 West 7th Street, Los Angeles, or to Messrs. Walter H. Baker Company, 178 Tremont Street, Boston, Mass., and 448 South Hill Street, Los Angeles.

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TOMAS: Otto is the one in the left-hand cage. He wasn't at all well last night. Rudolph was worried about him.

GRIGOR: Who is Rudolph? The other white mouse?

TOMAS: No. The other white mouse is Titania. Rudolph is my son. He bought the mice out of his own pocket-money. Oh, how he cried when I took them away this morning! He said, "Otto is sick. He wouldn't touch his cheese." But what was I to do when the major-domo told me to fetch two white mice—quickly—and gave me a silver-piece to pay for them? I believe the major-domo knew about Rudolph's mice.

GRIGOR: Do you think that is all they have to discuss in the palace of the King: your son's white mice?

TOMAS: No; but they probably discuss things which are less important.

GRIGOR (*struck*): That is true.

TOMAS: Didn't I say so?

GRIGOR: I have been on duty here for years and I have heard much childish talk. You are a newcomer. If it had not been for the mice you would not be——

TOMAS (*interrupting*): Tell me if you hear anybody coming.

GRIGOR: What are you going to do?

TOMAS: I brought Otto's cheese with me. Perhaps he'll eat it now. (*He crosses to the cages.*) Come, Otto! Come, Otto! (*He tries to raise a sheet of glass which closes the cage at the top.*) I can't lift it. It's fastened down.

GRIGOR: It's cemented down, you fool!

TOMAS: Cemented down?

GRIGOR: Air-tight.

TOMAS: Then how do they breathe?

GRIGOR (*taking a look into the hallway and snatching a puff at his cigarette*): Glass tubing connected to the cages. Pumps pumping air into the cages. The craziest arrangement I ever saw. (*As TOMAS investigates more closely*) Don't touch anything, or you may die instead of the mice.

TOMAS: Oh, are they going to kill the mice?

GRIGOR: So they say.

TOMAS: I didn't know that. I wouldn't have brought Rudolph's mice if I had known that. (*Thoughtfully*) I could have lied about them. I could have said——

GRIGOR (*sharply*): Do you care more about a mouse than about a man?

TOMAS: It depends on the mouse—and on the man. In three months a man becomes attached to a mouse.

GRIGOR: Yet you sold them for a silver-piece.

TOMAS (*shrugging his shoulders*): Except for my son Rudolph, who is eleven, there is no man I know whom I would not sell for less.

GRIGOR (*crushing out his cigarette*): How about yourself?

TOMAS (*indicating his uniform*): I sold myself long ago. (*He takes up his rifle and tests the sharpness of the bayonet with his thumb.*) Understand me, soldier, men are born to die: to die horribly, and I have helped some to die like that. Mice are different, particularly white mice named Otto and Titania. They are born to be happy, to nibble cheese and to dance. It is one thing to kill a man in battle. It is another to kill a mouse in cold blood.

GRIGOR: Attention!

[*The two present arms as there enters slowly a dignified gentleman who bears some resemblance to Whistler's portrait of Carlyle. He wears a cape and carries an ear-trumpet and a nondescript hat. He looks importantly about the room.*]

TOMAS (*in a whisper to GRIGOR*): Who is it?

GRIGOR (*in a normal voice*): The man who had the idea; Professor Antonides. . . . Talk as loudly as you like. He's deaf as a post.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES (*seeing the cages; crossing to them eagerly*): So here are the subjects! White mice! Hum! I suggested guinea-pigs, but white mice will answer. Yes, they will answer. They are healthy?

[*He turns to GRIGOR, putting his trumpet to his ear.*]

GRIGOR (*loudly*): Yes, Professor.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: What did you say?

GRIGOR (*going to him, and speaking directly into the trumpet*): I said, "Yes, professor."

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: Where did they get them?

GRIGOR (*into the trumpet*): They belonged to this soldier.

TOMAS: To my son.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: How fortunate! How very fortunate! If they have been somebody's pets they have been well cared for.

GRIGOR: They are exactly alike.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES (*rubbing his hands*): So I see! So I see!

TOMAS: They are not alike. One of them is Otto and the other is——

GRIGOR (*interrupting*): Be quiet.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: This one doesn't appear to be so lively as the other.

GRIGOR (*into the trumpet*): No, professor.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: But he moved! See? He moved!

GRIGOR: Yes, professor. Exactly alike.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: They seem to be normal subjects. Quite suitable; quite. (*He looks more closely.*) And this, doubtless, is the mechanism which supplies them with air. Ingenious; very ingenious. I invented it myself. Don't you think it's ingenious?

GRIGOR: Yes, professor.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: As if I cared what you thought! (*Importantly.*) I shall wait.

[*He crosses toward the left.*]

TOMAS (*glaring after him*): So he had the idea!

GRIGOR: Yes.

TOMAS: Of killing the mice?

GRIGOR: Rather than a hundred thousand men. Don't you read the newspapers?

TOMAS: Never.

GRIGOR: Don't you go to the drinking-places at night and talk with your friends?

TOMAS: When I am off duty I go home and talk with Rudolph.

[THE PROFESSOR *has opened the French window. Through it comes the shouts of a crowd: "War! War! War!"*]

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES (*turning to GRIGOR*): What are they shouting?

GRIGOR (*hurrying past him and closing the window*): Orders are to keep the window closed. Sometimes they cheer but sometimes they take pot-shots through it. (*He repeats into the trumpet*) Orders are to keep the window closed.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: What are they shouting?

GRIGOR: I don't know, professor.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES (*to TOMAS*): You didn't hear, either?

TOMAS (*catching GRIGOR's gesticulation*): No.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: It sounded like "More! More!" They often shout that at the end of my speeches. (*Turning back towards the window*) I should like to make a speech.

GRIGOR: No.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: No? . . . (*They shake their heads at each other.*) Well, I suppose you have your orders—as if I cared what your orders were. . . . I shall sit down.

[*He sits, near the window.*]

TOMAS: Attention!

[*There enter, mechanically returning the salute of the soldiers, who present arms and resume guard positions, the PRINCESS NORIA and GENERAL MALKOWSKY. THE PRINCESS, an aristocratic young woman in the twenties, is dressed in such Red Cross costume as a musical-comedy prima donna might wear: silk where there should be cotton, jewellery where there should be none, lip-stick, rouge, mascara, scarlet nails, high-heeled shoes. THE GENERAL is a conventional type, sixty, a gruff martinet much encrusted with medals and decorations.*]

NORIA: So these are the famous mice ! How pretty they are ! Oh, look ! They are white and they have pink noses ! (*With a change of manner*) General, you are sure they can't get out ? If they got out and began to run around——

THE GENERAL: Highness, this is war.

NORIA: Not yet.

THE GENERAL: Terrible things happen in war. Sometimes mice escape.

NORIA: You're joking, General ; and if they escaped, you'd shoot them, wouldn't you ? (*In the background TOMAS bristles.*) Are you the one who had the idea ?

THE GENERAL: God forbid ! (*He shakes his head and points to the spot, far to one side, where PROFESSOR ANTONIDES is seated, looking like nothing so much as a statue of himself. With hostility*) There's the man !

NORIA (*staring*): Oh !

THE GENERAL: Deaf.

NORIA: He's deaf ?

NORIA: Are you sure ? How nice ! We can say anything we please about him.

THE GENERAL: There is nothing I please to say about him—except that he should have been shot long ago.

NORIA: Who is he ?

THE GENERAL: Professor Antonides.

NORIA: Professor of what ?

THE GENERAL: Greek.

NORIA: In the University of Talaveria ?

THE GENERAL: I believe so.

NORIA: What has a Greek professor to do with white mice ?

THE GENERAL: He should have nothing to do with them.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES (*seeing them, rising, bowing deeply to THE PRINCESS*): Your Highness ! (*He bows less deeply to THE GENERAL.*) Your Excellency ! We have already had the pleasure of meeting.



THE GENERAL (*gruffly*): Ugh. (*He introduces him.*) Highness, this is Professor Antonides.

NORIA (*allowing him to kiss her hand*): Professor, you must explain your idea to me.

THE GENERAL: It has been in all the papers for weeks.

NORIA: I have been too busy organising the Red Cross to read the papers. I didn't hear of the white mice until this morning. Everyone was talking about the white mice. (*THE PROFESSOR has been moving his trumpet from side to side, trying to catch a word. Now she speaks directly into it.*) Professor, won't you explain?

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: Explain what?

NORIA: The mice. The idea. Everything.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: It is simple, Highness: ordeal by battle.

NORIA: Ordeal by battle?

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: Yes.

NORIA: The mice are to fight each other?

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: In a manner of speaking, yes.

NORIA: But how will you get them to do that?

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: Champions always fight for the nations they represent. These will be no exceptions. You will remember, Highness, how before the battle of Hastings, Taillefer, a Norman minstrel, rode out towards the enemy, singing, and tossing his sword into the air in a great gesture of defiance.

NORIA: Will the mice do that?

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: You have read, Highness, of the champion of the Philistines, who——

NORIA (*interrupting*): I remember! He was strong until they cut off his hair!

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: Our champions will represent us.

NORIA: The mice?

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: The mice. (*With pomposity*) It was all my idea: a heaven-sent idea which came to me late one night while I was reading Homer. As usual, our nation of Talaveria is on cordially bad terms with its neighbouring states. We are on such bad terms with one of them that war seems unavoidable.

NORIA: Then why should it be avoided?

THE GENERAL: Good for you, Highness!

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES (*who has not heard*): The object of war is to determine a victor. (*Putting his finger-tips together professorially*) Now, there are two ways in which that can be done.

THE GENERAL: There is only one way.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: The first is to fight the war, kill thousands of men, women, children; maim thousands of others; create new widows, orphans, criminals; ruin both countries.

THE GENERAL: That is the way it has always been done.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: The other is to settle, by a simple test, which country would be victorious.

THE GENERAL: The name of that test is war.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: Our scientists, as is generally known, have developed a new gas said to be the deadliest in the world's history.

NORIA: How clever of them! It's wonderful, don't you think?

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: Our neighbours claim that they have developed one even deadlier.

NORIA: That is what they would say.

THE GENERAL: Highness, it is merely a claim.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: At this moment guns, capable of firing from the heart of one capital into the other, and loaded with gas bombs, await the order to shoot. At this moment stratospheric balloons, carrying tons of our gas, are flying ten miles above the capital of our neighbour. They could exterminate every living soul in that city in five hours.

THE GENERAL: Four hours.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: We are not sure, but the enemy has probably made identical preparations. His stratospheres are doubtless flying high in the heavens above us at this moment.

NORIA: I'm not afraid of them !

THE GENERAL: Of course not !

NORIA: General, why don't our planes shoot them down ?

THE GENERAL: And help them to spread their gas, Highness ?

NORIA: Oh ! I didn't think of that.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: I had an idea. I wrote about it to one of my friends across the border. I received an enthusiastic reply. One way of discovering which of the two gases is most efficacious is to drench cities with them and kill most of the inhabitants. Another way is to test them under laboratory conditions, administer identical quantities of each to two guinea-pigs, two dogs, two mice—

TOMAS (*involuntarily*): Otto !

THE GENERAL (*wheeling*): What is it ?

TOMAS (*presenting arms nervously*): I only coughed, Excellency.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES (*continuing as if there had been no interruption*): Provide two identical animals, allow our friends, the enemy, to select which they are to test, which we are to test, administer the gasses simultaneously, and wait for results with stop-watches. Ordeal by battle ! The loss, two mice. The saving, millions in treasure and thousands of lives. Whatever the verdict, the enlightened government of our country will respect it.

THE GENERAL (*shouting into the trumpet*): Do you think the enemy will respect it ?

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: I have been assured that they will. If the mouse which we select dies first, their stratospheres will land and surrender. If the mouse they select dies first—

THE GENERAL: It will not.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: We will show that we are equally honourable.

NORIA: We are more than equally honourable, aren't we, General?

THE GENERAL: Of course, Highness.

NORIA: That's what I always thought. The suggestion of anything else is an insult.

THE GENERAL: Quite, Quite.

NORIA: Naturally.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: I wrote a broadside. I was thrown into a concentration camp.

THE GENERAL: He should have been shot there.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: My broadside was reprinted across the border. I was released.

THE GENERAL: Against my advice.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: The broadside was reprinted in other countries. The Government reversed its attitude and came to my support. I was invited to speak and I was permitted to do so. I addressed audiences: not large audiences, but intelligent ones. I spoke over the radio. I wrote articles in the newspapers. The great experiment is to be made this afternoon. I shall save uncountable lives. I shall be a benefactor of civilization. I shall inaugurate a new era of peace and justice.

THE GENERAL: The Professor's favourite letter is "I."

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: A professor of Greek, humble though he may be, shall teach multitudes! I am already an immortal!

*[And here, the spirit moving him, he launches into a stirring Pindaric ode, in the original, while from outside the window the shouting of the crowd, "War! War! War!" becomes louder and more threatening.]*

GRIGOR: Attention!

*[Through the right-hand door there comes briskly into the room a good looking middle-aged man attired in white duck trousers and a sweater. He is wearing boxing-gloves. It is THE KING,*

JOVAN II. *He is followed by JIM, his boxing instructor, who wears sneakers, grey trousers, and a blazer, and carries the King's tunic and sword.*

JOVAN: Hullo, Noria. Hullo, General.

THE GENERAL (*with suppressed excitement*): News, your Majesty?

JOVAN: I enquired just a few minutes ago. None then. (*As the GENERAL inclines respectfully*) You might call up and ask, General.

[THE GENERAL bows and hurries to the telephone.

NORIA: Jovan, may I present Professor Antonides?

JOVAN: How are you, Professor? (*He shakes hands with him.*) I hope you don't mind the gloves. (*He turns to the attendant.*) Jim, take these things off.

JIM: Yes, your Majesty.

JOVAN: I had four fast rounds with Jim to put me in the proper frame of mind for what is coming. When I think about other things, I think about boxing; and when I box I decide affairs of state with extraordinary ability.

[*He looks around for a "Yes," but THE PRINCESS merely smiles, THE PROFESSOR has not heard a word, and THE GENERAL is busy at the telephone.*

JIM (*coming to the rescue*): Yes, your Majesty.

JOVAN (*patting his back*): Jim always says the right thing. (*Free of the gloves, he turns to THE GENERAL, and the excitement in his voice is real.*) News, General?

THE GENERAL (*hanging up*): None yet, sire.

JOVAN: Hum! Hum! My uniform, Jim.

JIM: Yes, your Majesty.

[*He helps him into a magnificent tunic, blazing with decorations, and girds on a sword-belt and sword.*

JOVAN (*with a return to his former manner*): Noria, don't you think they go well together, the coat and the pants? That's why I wear these pants. When the affairs of state are over, I just slip out of the coat. (*Buttoning the tunic*) Who would



guess I'm wearing a sweater under it? (*To THE PROFESSOR, lowering his voice a little*) When the weather is hot, I wear nothing under it.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES (*who has heard nothing*): The mice will do very well, your Majesty.

NORIA (*laughing*): The Professor is deaf, Jovan.

JOVAN: So much the better.

GRIGOR: Attention!

[*There enters an individual whom we might describe as another professorial type were it not that when he speaks it is with an aggressively low-class American accent.*]

JOVAN: Tony! Splendid! (*He turns to THE PRINCESS.*) Noria, my dear: Professor Spagnoletti—our most illustrious chemist.

NORIA: How do you do, Professor?

TONY: How you, Princess?

JOVAN: General Malkowsky.

TONY (*with a most unprofessorial caper*): General!

JOVAN (*into the speaking trumpet*): Professor Antonides; Professor Spagnoletti.

TONY: Professor!

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: Whom did you say? Whom?

JOVAN: Professor Spagnoletti: our most illustrious chemist.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: But that is not Spagnoletti!

JOVAN: No?

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: This is an impostor! I know Spagnoletti well! I play chess with him nearly every night! Your Majesty has been grossly deceived!

JOVAN: Impossible!

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: Majesty, I swear it!

JOVAN: He resembles Spagnoletti, doesn't he? (*Shouting into the trumpet*) I said, he resembles him, doesn't he?

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: Oh, yes; but he is not the man. (*Surveying him*) He is much the same height and the same build, but I am not mistaken. Spagnoletti wears his moustache a little higher.

JOVAN: Hear that, Tony?

TONY: Yes, sir.

[*He removes his moustache and replaces it higher.*]

JOVAN: Is this better, Professor?

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES (*gasping*): Your Majesty!

JOVAN: Have you any other suggestions? The clothes are right, they're Spagnoletti's own. What do you think of the wig?

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES (*screaming*): Your Majesty is a party to this deception?

JOVAN: It is not a deception if it deceives nobody.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: The great experiment——

JOVAN (*cutting him short*): Will be made under conditions which *I* prescribe.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: I protest! I protest!

JOVAN: You do? Talk to him, Jim.

JIM: Yes, your Majesty.

[*He takes PROFESSOR ANTONIDES by the arm with a masterful grip, and walks him aside, speaking into his trumpet, while the PROFESSOR'S face registers astonishment, horror, dismay.*]

JOVAN: Tony, make sure that everything is as you wish it.

TONY: You bet.

[*He goes to the table on which are the mice; peers under it; raps on the sides of the cages; raises the cloth and looks under it; runs his hands over the apparatus, all in the stagy manner of a prestidigitator. There is a complete hush while the others watch.*]

JOVAN: Well?

TONY: All set.

JOVAN (*threateningly*): If there's a slip-up——!

TONY: There won't be none. See (*and waving his hand genially in the air, a small test-tube suddenly appears in it*) this here's a specimen of our pizen gas! The pizenest there ever was! One whiff, an' we'd all be goners! One pound kills a thousand men! Ten pounds wipes out an

army ! One ton massacrees every mother's soul in a big city ! Why, it's more pizenous than all the cobras in South Africa an' all the rattlesnakes in America rolled up in to one hissin', stingin' bundle of sudden death !

*[He has been gesticulating wildly, and he accidentally drops the tube. It shatters on the floor.]*

NORIA : Oh ! *(She screams loudly.)*

*[There is a sensation. THE GENERAL half draws his sword. GRIGOR's bayonetted rifle snaps into position for the thrust.]*

TONY *(wiping his brow with a red bandana)* : S'all right, Princess. There wasn't nothing but air in that one. Won't hurt you.

NORIA : Thank God ! *(She turns to THE KING, who has not moved a muscle, and there is real admiration in her voice.)* Jovan, how brave you were !

JOVAN *(shrugging his shoulders)* : A man who never knows whether he will be cheered or assassinated can afford to be brave. *(He turns to TONY.)* Tony, give me that bandana. Don't you know a professor wouldn't carry a rag like that ? Here: take one of my handkerchiefs.

TONY : Thanks, King.

JOVAN : " Sir."

TONY : Sure. " Sir."

JOVAN : Go on.

TONY : Well, as I was sayin', here's our gas: the pizenest there ever was. *(He waves his hand, and another tube appears in it. He interjects parenthetically)* It's all right if I smash a coupla toobs: there's plenty more where they come from. *(He turns back.)* Now, here's the mice: Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

TOMAS *(loudly and clearly)* : Otto and Titania.

THE GENERAL *(as everybody wheels)* : What was that ?

TOMAS *(saluting)* : Their names are Otto and Titania, Excellency. Otto is the one in the left-hand cage.

JOVAN *(after a pause)* : Thank you, my man. . . . Go on, Tony.

TONY: Well, Otto and Titania. All right. Now those other guys, they pick their mouse. They'll pick Otto, I guess, because he ain't near so lively as the other—what's her name?

TOMAS: Titania.

TONY: Titania. They put their test-toob in that there jar. We put ours in this here one. We close 'em air-tight. We pull this here lever—which smashes the toobs an' shoots the gas into the cages—an' then we see which mouse dies first.

NORIA (*after a pause*): Well?

TONY: Don't you get it yet, Princess? There's what looks like glass toobin' from the jars to the cages next to 'em, on'y it ain't what you think. Under the table the toobin' from this here jar (*on the left*) runs to this here cage (*on the right*), an' the toobin' from this one runs to that one: vicey virtue. They say they're goin' to kill this here mouse—while we clock 'em with stop-watches—an' all that happens is they kill the other; an' we put in a test-toob with just a little ammonia, an' their mouse lives eight or ten minutes.

NORIA: How clever!

JOVAN: The best glass-blowers in the kingdom worked on the tubing all night. What do you think, General?

THE GENERAL: Childish things amuse childish minds.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES (*rejoining the group*): Your Majesty, I repeat my protest!

JOVAN (*in an undertone*): General, the news. (THE GENERAL goes to the telephone again.) Your protest about what, Professor?

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: The impostor.

JOVAN: What of it? We are about to conduct a great scientific experiment. We have merely taken steps to make sure that it turns out correctly. What true patriot should object? Any man who does object, cannot be one. (*Shrewdly*) The credit, Professor, will go to you.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES (*staggered*): To me?

JOVAN: To you. The epoch-making experiment: the idea of Professor Antonides. A world full of peace and goodwill: the achievement of Professor Antonides! The people will erect statues of you.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: Of me?

JOVAN: I myself will design a commemorative postage stamp with your portrait on it. The experiment must take place.

*[He makes a sign to JIM.]*

JIM: Come along, Professor.

*[He walks him away firmly.]*

THE GENERAL (*hanging up*): Majesty——

JOVAN (*alertly*): Yes?

THE GENERAL: No news.

NORIA: What are you expecting, Jovan?

JOVAN: News! News! News!

NORIA: But the biggest news of all is here, isn't it?

JOVAN: For those who think so, yes.

GRIGOR: Attention!

*[There enter THE AMBASSADOR, a MILITARY ATTACHÉ in the uniform of a colonel, and still another professorial-looking person. There are salutations, polite but frigid.]*

JOVAN: Your Excellency!

THE AMBASSADOR: Your Majesty! Your Highness! General! I have already had the honour of presenting our military attaché, the Colonel. Permit me now to introduce our most illustrious chemist, Professor Loven.

JOVAN (*with a start of surprise which he suppresses to address the last-named*): We are greatly honoured. Er—have you, by any chance, met our own great chemist, Professor Spagnoletti?

THE AMBASSADOR (*answering for him*): Professor Loven has been working with irritating gases for so many months that his throat is affected. (*He glances at PROFESSOR LOVEN.*) I gather, that like the rest of the world, he has heard of



Professor Spagnoletti, but has never had the privilege of meeting him.

JOVAN: Ah? Indeed? Then allow me to present the two great men to each other. (*They bow stiffly.*) And all of you, I take it, are familiar with our beloved Professor Antonides.

[*There are more stiff bows, PROFESSOR ANTONIDES doing his best awkwardly.*]

THE AMBASSADOR: We are ready, your Majesty, to proceed with the experiment. As agreed between the high contracting parties, the Colonel has brought specimens of our gas.

NORIA (*emphasising the plural*): Specimens? Several? In that box?

THE AMBASSADOR: Yes, your Highness. (*As THE KING moves suddenly towards THE COLONEL*) The Colonel has his orders. In the event that your Majesty should condescend to assault him, he will not resist. He will respectfully allow the box containing our gas-filled ampoules to fall to the floor.

JOVAN: Oh!

THE AMBASSADOR: The ampoules will break, and we shall all be dead in ten seconds.

JOVAN: How disagreeable!

THE AMBASSADOR: In the event that your Majesty should condescend to shoot the Colonel while he is resting the box on the table, he will not rest it on the table.

JOVAN: Oh!

THE AMBASSADOR: He will hold it in his hands—tenderly.

JOVAN (*with not too much indignation*): Is your Excellency questioning our good faith?

THE AMBASSADOR: I question nothing. Neither do those, who, in my own country are following this experiment with such profound interest. Your Majesty has doubtless observed that the Colonel is wearing a portable radio set. Every word that is spoken here is heard by my august master.

JOVAN (*laughing*): Oh, is it? Then give him my regards. . . . No! I'll do it myself. (*He speaks into the apparatus which hangs on THE COLONEL'S breast.*) Hullo, Ferdie! Are you there? We all want to be remembered to you! (*Turning back*) It's a pity he can't answer. He has such a lively gift of repartee.

THE AMBASSADOR (*coldly*): Shall we proceed?

JOVAN: By all means. (*He gesticulates to TONY, THE AMBASSADOR to PROFESSOR LOVEN, and these two busy themselves at the apparatus.*) As your Excellency perceives, the apparatus is built entirely of glass. Its fairness is above question.

THE AMBASSADOR: Our expert is already making his examination.

JOVAN: The animals are similar. (*Glancing at TOMAS*) They are of the same age, are they not?

TOMAS (*saluting*): Twins, your Majesty.

JOVAN: They are this soldier's pets.

TOMAS: The pets of my son Rudolph, Majesty.

JOVAN: Even better! Rudolph has tended them well.

TOMAS: It is so, Majesty.

JOVAN: Their names are——

TOMAS: Otto and Titania.

JOVAN: Otto and Titania.

[*The two experts have been making a scrupulous examination. Now TONY speaks.*]

TONY: Say, King——

JOVAN (*turning, and crushing him with a look*): Yes? (*TONY is seized with a fit of coughing, yet his gestures are clear.*) I take it that the professor wishes you to choose your animal.

THE AMBASSADOR: Quite. (*He glances at his own expert, who indicates.*) This one.

[*He points to the left-hand cage. The two professors change places.*]

JOVAN (*rubbing his hands*): Good! The Ambassador has chosen this one—er——

TOMAS: Otto, Majesty..

JOVAN: And we have chosen the other——

TOMAS: Titania, Majesty.

JOVAN: Titania is a lady?

TOMAS: It is so, Majesty.

JOVAN: It will not be the first time that the fortunes of the kingdom have depended upon one. (*He looks around for a "Yes" and repeats emphatically*) It will not be the first time the fortunes of Talaveria have depended on a lady.

JIM (*hurrying up*, PROFESSOR ANTONIDES *in tow*): Yes, your Majesty.

JOVAN: Jim always says the right thing. . . . Are you ready, gentlemen? (*The experts bow.*) The ampoules are in place? (*He turns to THE AMBASSADOR.*) Will your Excellency give the word? Or better yet, will your Excellency himself set the apparatus in motion?

THE AMBASSADOR: I leave that to your Majesty.

[*He takes out his watch.*]

JOVAN: Yes. No. (*He turns to THE PRINCESS.*) Noria, you shall have the honour.

NORIA (*shaking her head*): Let it go to the man whose idea it was: Professor Antonides.

JOVAN: A happy thought! (*Into the ear-trumpet*) Professor, at this critical juncture in world history, destiny calls upon you to play a principal role. Painters yet unborn will set on canvas their versions of this unprecedented moment. First a speech, as flowery as you please, because Ferdie is listening. Be sure you speak in the direction of the Colonel's microphone. Then you step to the apparatus and make yourself immortal by throwing the lever. Professor Antonides!

[*He leads the scattering applause.*]

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES (*in a state of great perturbation*): Your Majesty—your Majesty——

JOVAN: Go on. We are waiting.

[*He, too, produces his watch.*]

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES (*brokenly*): Your Majesty—

JOVAN: There are only two majesties: Ferdie and myself.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: Highness—gentlemen: I had hoped—I had hoped to inaugurate an era of better understanding between nations; an era in which reason and calm judgment would triumph over brutality and elemental force. I cannot—I cannot—go on with the experiment—

JOVAN (*icily*): And why not?

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: Because—because——

[*He waves his hand towards the cages.*]

NORIA: I see it! (*She screams.*) I see it! Stop! Stop!

JOVAN: What is it?

NORIA: One of the mice—that one—has fallen on his side!

JOVAN: The animal they chose!

NORIA (*as they all crowd about the cages*): He has rolled on his back! He is twitching! He is motionless!

JOVAN: Motionless!

NORIA: He isn't breathing!

JOVAN (*to THE AMBASSADOR*): Excellency, look for yourself!

THE AMBASSADOR: It is impossible!

JOVAN (*to TOMAS*): Come here! Look!

TOMAS (*in consternation*): Otto is dead!

JOVAN: Do you hear him? The mouse Otto is dead! The experiment has not begun, and the animal you have chosen is dead! Excellency, I accuse you of trickery!

THE AMBASSADOR: Majesty!

JOVAN: Your expert merely examines a glass cage, and the animal it contains is dead in ten seconds!

THE AMBASSADOR: Majesty!

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES (*who has heard nothing*): The experiment must be made honestly.

JOVAN: Of course it must! An experiment under test conditions, and it is over before it has commenced!

Excellency, who is the great chemist you brought here and who is unable to speak ? (TONY suddenly grasps PROFESSOR LOVEN's beard. *It comes off.*) Ah ! Know him, Tony ?

TONY : Sure, King. He used to be a headliner on the Keith circuit.

JOVAN : To perform a serious scientific experiment, you brought a common magician !

THE AMBASSADOR : Your Majesty received me with one.

JOVAN : That is different. It was necessary for me to be on guard.

TONY : King, I don't know how he croaked that mouse with me watching.

JOVAN : I should have hired him instead of you.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES (*who is catching the drift*) : We can obtain another mouse—and new cages.

JOVAN : Your suggestion comes too late. The experiment is finished.

THE GENERAL (*at the telephone*) : News ! News !

JOVAN : If it is good, say what it is.

THE GENERAL : Majesty, it is good. Yes. Yes. . . . (*He rises from the instrument with a scrap of paper on which he has been writing.*) Half an hour ago a strong force of enemy troops crossed our frontier. The enemy high command, believing that we were giving all our thought to this nonsensical experiment, expected us to be unprepared. We were, but we were nevertheless able to oppose them with an overwhelmingly superior force, which killed or captured them all. In accordance with plan, our troops were thereupon seized with a patriotic fervour so intense that they could not be restrained from crossing the border at six different points, crushing all resistance. (*Referring to the paper*) They have already captured three villages, blown up a hospital, and burned an orphan asylum.

NORIA : How marvellous !

THE AMBASSADOR : Majesty—this is war !

JOVAN : And has been for the last half-hour !



THE AMBASSADOR: I ask for my passports.

JOVAN: They are ready.

NORIA: Jovan, our stratospheres: why don't they drop their bombs?

JOVAN: Because we haven't any stratospheres.

THE AMBASSADOR: You haven't? Neither have we.

NORIA: Our guns loaded with gas: why don't they shoot?

JOVAN: Because we haven't any gas. The Japanese refused to sell us unless we paid cash in advance. (*Turning energetically to THE AMBASSADOR*) How about you?

THE AMBASSADOR: Alas, Majesty, we, too, never pay our debts.

JOVAN: I thought so!

THE GENERAL (*exultantly*): This is war! War! I shall leave for the front!

NORIA: I, too. There will be many wounded.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: Stop! The experiment! The experiment must be resumed! If there is no gas, we must test the guns—the ammunition—the accuracy of the cannoneers! War is childish!

JOVAN (*in a sudden hush*): Professor, when two or three men reason together, the result is sometimes wisdom. When two or three million attempt to reason, the result is always childish. War is childish, but my people want it, and if I do not give them what they want, I shall cease to be king.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES (*furious*): You have played with me, Majesty! Here am I, an educated man, and you follow where that blind fool leads!

JOVAN (*calmly*): You are referring, I take it, to the General?

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: I am.

JOVAN: You are a professor of Greek. You have studied Homer.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: I have.

JOVAN: You appreciate Homer better than my gruff old general here?

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: Infinitely !

JOVAN: Then ask yourself which of the two, yourself or the General, Homer would be more likely to appreciate !  
(*He salutes the company.*) Gentlemen, you are dismissed.

[*He crosses to the French window, opens it, and shows himself on the balcony. There are cheers and shouts of "War ! War ! War !"*]

THE GENERAL goes ; THE PRINCESS goes ; THE AMBASSADOR and his attendants go ; TONY and JIM go. There are left only the soldiers at the door and PROFESSOR ANTONIDES.

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES (*staggering towards the cages*): My idea ! My experiment !

TOMAS (*barring his way with his rifle*): You did for one of them ! Let the other alone !

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES (*turning ; staggering towards the window*): My experiment !

JOVAN (*re-entering from the window, closing it, and shutting off the cheers*): They want war !

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES: How do you know ?

JOVAN: They didn't shoot me. (*He claps THE PROFESSOR on the shoulder heartily.*) Cheer up, Professor ! There will always be wars. Perhaps you will stop the next one.

[*He salutes him smartly ; goes, taking the salutes of the sentries.*]

PROFESSOR ANTONIDES (*speaking aloud ; moving to the window*): I shall speak to the people ! I shall speak to the people !

[*He flings the window open. There are shouts "War ! War ! War !"* There is a shot. He spins and falls.

GRIGOR: They shot him ! (*He crosses to him and investigates.*) He is dead.

TOMAS (*nodding grimly*): If they had shot him yesterday, Otto would be alive this minute.

[*He produces the cheese from his pocket, and crossing to the cages, begins to pry up the lid confining Titania.*]

*The shouts and cheers from outside become deafening.*



Josephina Niggli

THE RED VELVET GOAT

*A Mexican Folk-Play*

*This play was written in the playwriting course at the UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, and was originally produced by THE CAROLINA PLAYMAKERS at Chapel Hill on April 25th, 1936.*

## CHARACTERS

<i>Esteban</i>	—	—	—	W. T. CHICHESTER
<i>Mariana, his wife</i>	—	—	—	HESTER BARLOW
<i>Lorenzo, their son</i>	—	—	—	ROBERT DU FOUR
<i>Ramón, a pedlar</i>	—	—	—	HOLMAN MILHOUS
<i>Ester</i>	—	—	—	RUTH MENGEL
<i>Carmen</i>	—	—	—	FRANCES JOHNSTON
<i>Lola</i>	—	—	—	AUDREY ROWELL
<i>Don Pepe, the mayor</i>			—	GERALD HOCHMAN
<i>Doña Berta, a widow</i>			—	JANIE BRITT
<i>Man in the Crowd</i>	—	—	—	JOSEPH FELDMAN
<i>Drunk</i>	—	—	—	AL NOOGER

*Crowd:* HERBERT KANE, MARY DELANEY, KENNETH BARTLETT, JEAN WALKER, GEORGE STARKS, CONRAD POPPENHUSEN, THOMAS O'FLAHERTY

AUTHOR'S NOTE: This is not a play, nor a revue skit, nor anything such as is generally seen on the English-speaking stage. It comes from the Spanish theatre, and is called a *saenete*. The dictionary translates it as a farce, but this is not a true definition. The true *saenete* is simply a picture of what we call the "lower classes" lifted from reality to the stage. It is written in poetic dialogue, it is a comedy, and it has a romantic flavour. These are the general rules.

For this *saenete* of mine I have chosen the presentation of a home-made play such as one can see in any village from Quintana Roo to the Rio Grande. When a Mexican goes to a play he goes, not as a spectator, but with the firm intention of being as much a part of the drama as the actors on the stage. It is the prompter, however, who bears the full burden of the performance, and so, to him, health and wealth.

The play is reprinted from *American Folk Plays*, by Professor Frederick H. Koch, published by the D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc., 35 West 32nd Street, New York City, and 34 Bedford Street, London, W.C.2.

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SCENE: ESTEBAN's house on the Street of the Arches in the town of the Three Marys.

*The late afternoon sun has thrown a golden haze over the patio of ESTEBAN's home. It is not a magnificent patio. There is no fountain with flowers banked around it, as in the home of DON PEPE, although there are pots of flowers on the stoop of the door which opens into a bedroom on the R. If it were noon, there would be chickens scratching about, and perhaps a baby pig or two, but it is evening, and the livestock have been closed up in the corral which is beyond the gate on the L.*

*There are benches in front of us, and two rocking-chairs swaying back and forth in front of a platform that is made of planks resting on saw-horses placed against the outside wall of the house at the back. This platform, these chairs, these benches are not usually found in ESTEBAN's patio, but they are here this afternoon because he is going to present a play of his own composition. The platform is in a very convenient place, since there is a door leading into the living-room which serves very well for the actors to make their entrances and exits. That funny little box in front of the platform is for the prompter, and those grey blankets dangling from the rope attached to the posts at the two front corners of the platform serve as curtains.*

*L., now partly closed, is the great wooden door that opens directly on the streets from the patio, and if you care to peer through the iron barred window in the R. wall you will see MARIANA's dress, which she intends to wear in her husband's play, laid out on the bed.*

*The boy, standing on the platform, clutching the stool in his two hands, is LORENZO, very brown of eyes and skin and very black of hair. He wears the white pyjama suit of the tropics, with a red bandana knotted at the throat. Because he is twenty-two, old enough to have a sweetheart, he has on a pair of bright yellow shoes that frankly hurt.*

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All applications for permission to perform this play must be made to Messrs. Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2; or, for South Africa, to Messrs. Samuel French, P.O. Box 497, Nairobi; or, for Canada, to Messrs. Samuel French (Canada), Ltd., 480 University Avenue, Toronto; or, for the U.S.A., to Messrs. Samuel French, Inc., 25 West 45th Street, New York City, or 811 West 7th Street, Los Angeles.

The play is published by Messrs. Samuel French at 1s. net.

*That woman standing R., with her hands buckled on her hips, that flaming, flashing woman is MARIANA, his mother. Although she is forty there is no grey in the black satin cap of her hair; there are no wrinkles in the smooth golden cream of her skin; and as for her body . . . well, even the loose white blouse and the billowing red muslin skirt cannot hide the youthful fire in that pretty body.*

*It seems almost impossible to think of ESTEBAN, the man leaning against the edge of the platform L. . . . it seems almost impossible to think of this funny, fat little man as being MARIANA's husband. Sometimes he wakes up in the night, especially after feast days, and wonders himself how he ever came to marry such a gorgeous creature. Poor ESTEBAN with his funny little blob of a nose perched in the middle of a round moon face, is no match for MARIANA and he knows it. His hands are always aimlessly clutching at each other. They are doing it now as he watches LORENZO with the stool.*

MARIANA (*impatiently to LORENZO*): No, fool! Where are your brains? Remove the chair and place it in the corner to the right. Esteban, speak! You are the master of the play.

ESTEBAN: To hear you rattle on, a man would think it was your scene. (*He points L.*) The stool goes there.

MARIANA (*points R.*): No, there! Would you have it hide the door?

ESTEBAN (*angrily*): I say it goes there! Lorenzo, place it where I say or I will break your head!

LORENZO (*who through the argument has been standing still patiently holding the stool, now bangs it down in front of him on the platform*): Holy saints! Whom am I to obey? I'll put it here, and you can change it where you like. I am an actor, not a doll on strings. I must go read my part again.

[*He goes out through the platform door, slamming it behind him.*  
MARIANA *hides a laugh.*

MARIANA: He says he is an actor. Haha! Then I am queen of tragedy. What hour does it grow to be?

ESTEBAN (*taking a large gold watch from his pocket*): My watch says eight, so then it must be six. (*He bends towards her, clasping his hands tightly together.*) Does all the world know of the benefit?

MARIANA: Musicians played before each door in town. I sent Lorenzo out with notices this morning. Do you think our guests will pay enough to buy a goat?

[*She sinks down on the end of one of the benches.*]

ESTEBAN: We only need ten pesos for a goat. Don Pepe said he'd sell us one of his. With the money from its milk and cheese we'll have enough to buy another one, and soon we'll have a flock. Then we'll be the richest two in town.

MARIANA (*scornfully*): Just with one goat? What silken dreams you can build from air. To hear you speak no man in all the northern part of Mexico will be so rich as you when this play is done.

ESTEBAN (*with modest pride*): My talents are so varied, Mariana. Perhaps we should not buy a goat at all. Anyone can own a goat, but I, and I alone, can compose such drama.

MARIANA: A truth, a little truth indeed, my 'Steban. No other man could write such plays (*she flares at him*) . . . because he would not write them. I think it best to buy the goat.

ESTEBAN (*shocked*): Have you no soul, no breath of genius blowing through your feeble brain? In time the world shall hear of this Esteban and mourn the fact that he possessed such a blockhead for a wife.

MARIANA (*peevish*): Who gave you hints of how to write it best but me, me, me! Who furnished you with chairs, and clothes, and men? Yes, men? (*She goes to him, her eyes burning with anger.*) Lorenzo is my son as much as yours. Oh, when I wept and cried the night that he made his first entry in the world I did not think that he would grow to be an actor.

ESTEBAN: Do not fear. My son has failed to grasp my talent. He . . .

MARIANA: Is better, far, than you will ever be.

ESTEBAN (*grandly ignoring her*): Did you bring the vase from Doña Berta's?

MARIANA: It is on the table in the house next to my red and blue one. You see, I do not forget, even if you do.

[*She goes into the bedroom R.*]

ESTEBAN (*following her to the door and calling after her*): Now what have I forgotten?

MARIANA (*from inside*): Just a prompter, that is all.

[*She enters, goes to the platform, and places the vases on the prompter's box, standing back to see the effect.*]

A little prompter to aid us with his book when we forget.

ESTEBAN (*with a gasp*): I meant to ask Don Pepe . . .

MARIANA (*sarcastically*): Did you indeed? Don Pepe, the mayor of the Three Marys! Perhaps you would prefer to have the President of the Republic, or the great civil judge to read our lines for us! Where are your wits, fool? Hanging from your nose like Spanish moss upon an ancient wind-blown tree?

ESTEBAN (*wringing his hands*): It grows near the hour of our performance! Why did you not remind me of this small detail?

MARIANA (*flinging her arms above her head*): Remind you! Saints in Heaven! Holy Mary aid me! Oh, what ass is this dressed in man's clothing? Must I remember everything? Or was the play of your invention?

ESTEBAN (*maliciously*): Who gave me hints of how to write it? Who gave me chairs, and clothes, and men, but you, my little, darling wife?

MARIANA (*furious*): But even I could not give you wit, my love. Each day I watch your ears grow longer and more pointed. Some day they will fall down and slap your cheeks, like that (*she gives him a resounding slap*) . . . and then you will remember Mariana.

ESTEBAN (*ruefully*): You are the whip I wear here at my belt, my sweet (*he rubs his face*) . . . a whip that does not need my hand to wield its power.

MARIANA: Enough of arguments. The crowd will soon be here. Go out and hunt a prompter.

ESTEBAN (*scandalized*): At this hour? Have you no thought at all for my great art? Am I not the hero of this play?



In a short time I must walk across that stage, and even now my poor heart is beating in my chest, and see my hands (*he wiggles them loosely*) . . . shaking at the wrist.

MARIANA (*firmly*): Am I not the tragic lady of this play? I will not speak a line of your great drama until a man is safe within that box.

ESTEBAN (*imploring aid from Heaven*): Why did I marry such a woman, who loves an argument more than her soul's salvation?

MARIANA (*also imploring Heaven*): Why did I marry such a lazy fool, who would rather sit in the sun and watch the goats feed on the mountain-side than make an honest living for his family?

[LORENZO opens the platform door and sticks his head through.

LORENZO: There are some people coming up the hill.

MARIANA (*giving a startled shriek and running towards the bedroom door R.*): The audience! And I not dressed!

ESTEBAN (*stopping her*): Mariana, Lorenzo can find the man we need. (*As MARIANA pauses, he turns to LORENZO.*) My son, we need a prompter. Go into the town and search for one.

MARIANA: Bring back a man who can read, and not some ignorant fool.

LORENZO (*coming out on the platform, a large square piece of red velvet in his hands*): I have already spoken to Don Pancho's son, Ramón. The one who peddles silks and threads to all the women in the towns near by. He can read, yes, and write, too.

MARIANA (*her eyes fixed on the velvet, and speaking in a strangled voice*): Lorenzo! Lorenzo, for what is that red velvet?

LORENZO (*innocently*): To cover the prompter's box, my mother, so that all the world shall know we give a play.

MARIANA (*stalking up to the platform*): Where did you get it? Where did you find that strip of goods?

[ESTEBAN frantically signals to LORENZO to keep quiet.

LORENZO (*looking curiously at his father*): What is it, sir? Why



do you not speak out ? I cannot read such wavings of the hands.

[ESTEBAN *sinks down on one of the benches with a helpless gasp.*

MARIANA (*swings on him*): So ! It was you who gave it to him, eh ? Well, search your brain for clever, useless answers. Where did you find the velvet ?

ESTEBAN (*pleadingly*): Mariana, you have not worn that dress in many years. Not once have you worn it since our wedding day.

MARIANA (*slowly*): My dress. My beautiful red dress. The dress I wore when I first met the man I loved. (*She glares at him.*) From which part did you cut it ?

LORENZO (*helpfully*): From the back. (*He turns around and makes an effort to show her how high up the cut came.*) You could replace the goods with a piece of red silk. Besides, when you are talking to your friends, they would not peer behind to see the difference.

MARIANA (*bursting into tears*): Oh, love of God and all the little angels ! When was a woman so afflicted with such fools for a family ?

ESTEBAN (*awkwardly patting her shoulder*): I know, my sweet, my heart's queen, my little cooing dove, that you have kept it out of sentiment. But you have other gowns that you first wore at our early meetings.

MARIANA (*jerking away from him*): I said I wore it when I met the man I loved, not the ass I married ! (*Blazing out at them*) Get out of my sight, the two of you ! Oh, saints in Heaven, you and your plays and goats, and my red velvet gown. (*Her voice drops to a quiet deadly tone.*) I will make you pay for this, my friend.

[*Girls' voices are heard in the street.*

LORENZO (*excitedly*): We must draw the curtains. The audience arrives.

MARIANA: Will you leave before I break a piece of wood across your heads ? (*She screams.*) Get out !

ESTEBAN (*jumping up on the platform*): We had best leave, my son. Your mother feels a little nervous.

[*As they start out ESTEBAN looks at MARIANA, who has walked to the gate L. and has her back turned to them. He runs to the prompter's box, drapes it with the velvet, then hastily pulls the curtains as the girls appear at the gate. He and LORENZO disappear through the platform door.*]

MARIANA (*opening the gate*): Enter, enter. Our house is yours.

[*ESTER, LOLA and CARMEN enter. Their skirts are of striped material, their blouses very white and clean. Their hair falls in two plaits over their shoulders and they possess the wild, shy beauty of young deer. All three have on shawls. When they speak their voices are high and shrill and sweet, and they have the habit of giggling behind their hands.*]

ESTER: Here is our money, Doña Mariana.

LOLA: Will Lorenzo play a part?

[*All giggle at LOLA's boldness.*]

MARIANA (*beaming on them*): He will indeed.

CARMEN: May we sit anywhere we like?

MARIANA (*nodding*): Wherever you may choose to sit save in the rocking-chairs. They are for Doña Berta and Don Pepe.

[*The girls giggle as they find their places. RAMÓN comes to the gate. RAMÓN is very handsome and knows it. He wears a stiff straw hat, a bright pink shirt, a black tie, brown trousers, and shoes that are more orange than yellow, with button tops. His voice drips with personality.*]

RAMÓN: Is this the house of one Esteban Elizondo? Is this the house where there will be a play?

[*MARIANA gazes thoughtfully at him. To her, any new man is subject to conquest. It is perfectly harmless. She has never been unfaithful to ESTEBAN. She just likes to know that she could be if she wanted to.*]

MARIANA: So you are old Don Pancho's youngest son, Ramón?

RAMÓN (*making her a low bow*): Your servant, señorita.

MARIANA (*smiling faintly*): I am Lorenzo's mother.

RAMÓN (*stepping back*): Impossible ! Why, you do not look so old as he. (*He lifts her hand.*) Allow me to press a kiss upon your hand from my dirty mouth.

[ESTEBAN, *sticking his head through the curtain, sees this gallant gesture and glares at them.*

LOLA (*tittering*): Good evening, Don Esteban.

ESTEBAN (*grumpily*): You may not speak to me. I am not here. I am behind the curtain. (*Trying to show his authority*) Mariana ! Take his money and let him in.

MARIANA (*shrugging her shoulders*): He is the prompter.

ESTEBAN (*snapping at her*): Then he should be safely in his box, and you changing your gown. I will not have you roll the eye at every man who comes along.

RAMÓN: Would you be jealous of me, Don Esteban, and I only a poor pedlar of woman's goods ?

ESTEBAN: I trust no man when Mariana rolls the eye. Lorenzo will stand at the gate.

[LORENZO *sticks his head through the curtains below* ESTEBAN'S.

CARMEN: Good evening, Lorenzo.

[*The three girls giggle.*

LORENZO: Good evening, Carmen, Lola. . . . (*He gives a deep sigh, for he is in love with ESTER.*) . . . Good evening, Ester.

ESTEBAN (*sharply*): You may not speak to them. Are they not the audience ? Are you not on the stage ? You must stand at the gate and take the money in your mother's place.

LORENZO: But I cannot stand at the gate and learn my part.

ESTEBAN (*yelling, since the poor man is irritated beyond endurance*): You should know your part ! You will stand where I direct you.

[*He gives him a push, and LORENZO, who is holding the curtains, swings out, falling off the platform, taking curtains and ESTEBAN with him. The girls scream and stand up on their bench. MARIANA and RAMÓN laugh.*

ESTEBAN (*from below the mass of curtains*): Help us up !

LORENZO (*wailing*): Ay, Father, you are sitting on my stomach.

MARIANA (*strolling over to the jerking heap of curtains*): Do I stay and take the money, my dear love ?

ESTEBAN: You will change your gown.

RAMÓN: Here comes Don Pepe climbing up the hill. He will enjoy this drama. Not every hero can be wrapped in blankets.

[*A low murmur of voices from the road at L. can be heard growing louder and louder.*]

MARIANA: Speak quickly, my sweet turnip.

ESTEBAN (*frantically fighting with the curtains*): Help me up and you can own the goat.

MARIANA (*trying to hide her laughter*): Will you lend your hand, Ramón ?

RAMÓN (*making her a deep bow*): For you, dear lady, I would cage the sun in a crystal lamp, and borrow a star's five points to bind your hair.

LORENZO (*moaning*): Father, will you get off my stomach ?

ESTEBAN (*as RAMÓN helps him up*): I will, when peddling fools remember how to act instead of speaking airy verses to the moon's left ear. (*Moving threateningly towards RAMÓN*) As for you, my fine friend . . .

MARIANA (*hastily*): No time for speeches now. Aid Lorenzo with the curtain.

LOLA: May we help ?

MARIANA: You may indeed with Don Pepe at our gates. I will hold him off until the task is finished.

RAMÓN (*gallantly*): My arm, lady ?

MARIANA (*taking it with a smile meant to infuriate ESTEBAN*): Thank you, Ramón.

[*They exit through the gate. ESTEBAN hangs over it gazing jealously after them. LORENZO is putting up the curtains.*]

ESTER (*watching LORENZO*): You are very strong.

LORENZO: In all the valley there is no man so strong as I.

LOLA (*helping LORENZO with the curtains*): So Ester said yesterday.

[*She giggles.*]

ESTER (*snapping at her*): You have no right to repeat my words.

LORENZO (*forgetting the curtain and stepping down from the platform in front of ESTER*): You spoke of me . . . yesterday?

CARMEN (*helping LOLA with the curtains*): You are the constant subject of her speech.

ESTER: Who gave you leave to tell such tales of me?

[*She flounces over and sits on the bench. LORENZO follows her.*]

LORENZO (*softly*): Will you be at the plaza to-night?

ESTER (*turning her back on him*): I do not know.

[*LORENZO moves around to see her face, but she promptly turns her back again.*]

LORENZO: If you are there, will you walk around with me?

ESTER (*pleasantly shocked*): Alone?

LORENZO (*boldly*): Alone. Three times around.

ESTER (*gasping for breath*): But that would say to all the world that we were engaged!

LORENZO (*sitting beside her*): My father soon will have enough to buy a goat, and then two goats, and then a herd. He will give me money to buy a wedding gown for you, and slippers . . . small white slippers. (*As the final tantalizing bit, since any beggar could have real flowers*) And orange blossoms fashioned out of wax.

ESTER (*turning away her head*): Who can marry anyone without a house?

LORENZO: We will have a house with floors of soft blue tile. There will be a patio with white flowers growing in it. And, at night, when the moon is shining, there will be a light of pure green silver on your face. The locusts will hum their



scratchy tunes, and the grey mocking-birds will wake and sing to us.

ESTER: What will they sing?

LORENZO: Of other lands they've seen beneath the moon. Of dusky jewels shining on white arms. Of fields of flowers sweet in bloom. Night-blooming jasmine, and the pale filagree of oleander. Of lilies, fragile as your hands, and blossoming thorn too sweet for any man to know its fragrance.

ESTER (*moves to another bench and stands looking down at it*): Is that all?

LORENZO (*following her*): Perhaps they will sing of mountains like purple ships against the soft pink evening sky . . . of cities that are pearls on the golden breasts of distant valleys . . .

ESTER (*whispering*): Is that all?

LORENZO (*softly*): Perhaps they will sing of blue tiled floors, and you and me. (*He catches up her hand.*) Will you walk around the plaza, three times, alone?

ESTER (*facing him, and once again the flirt*): With you?

LORENZO: With me.

ESTER: To-night?

LORENZO (*stepping closer to her*): To-night.

ESTER (*drawing back—she hears voices in the street*): There is Don Pepe.

LORENZO (*catching her wrist*): But will you come?

ESTER (*jerking away from him, then laughing up into his face*): Perhaps!

[*She runs up to LOLA and CARMEN at the platform.*]

LORENZO (*catches his breath, then flings back his head and begins to sing triumphantly*):

Shadow of our lord, St. Peter,  
The river lures me,  
The river lures me.  
And thus your love  
Would my poor love allure . . .  
My love allure.

ESTEBAN (*turning*): Stop your cackling. Behind the curtains with you, and you, señoritas, to your chairs.

[*The girls giggle as they return to their bench.*]

LORENZO (*as he passes ESTER he whispers*): To-night?

[*ESTER tosses her head at him. LORENZO and ESTEBAN disappear behind the curtains as DON PEPE, the mayor of the Three Marys, enters with DOÑA BERTA on his arm. She is a large impressive woman, while he is a tiny spry little man. A crowd of men and women follow them. The men wear various coloured bandanas knotted about their throats, and the white pyjama suits of the tropics, while the women are in colours as brilliant as the birds of the jungle country. They are all in a very gay humour, ready to enjoy the play.*]

DON PEPE (*impressively*): I have not seen a play upon the stage since I was last in the United States. (*He leads DOÑA BERTA to the rockers.*) Good evening, Carmen, Lola, Ester.

LOLA: Do they have plays upon a stage in the United States?

DON PEPE: They have the photographs of people who walk across a screen and talk like you or me.

CARMEN (*giggles*): Oh, Don Pepe, what a tease you are.

DON PEPE: And what is more, they can make their water hot or cold with merely the turning of a handle.

MAN IN CROWD: Now, Don Pepe, would you play with us?

DON PEPE (*with a luxurious sigh*): Ay, it is an education to travel.

DOÑA BERTA: I prefer my own bed every night.

ESTER: Is it true that girls can walk with men, even though they are not engaged?

DON PEPE: It is indeed.

DOÑA BERTA (*scandalized*): A most immoral custom. Put not such foreign thoughts in our girls' heads, Don Pepe.

DON PEPE (*rising and making her a low bow, then sitting down again*): Always your obedient servant, Doña Berta.

MARIANA (*to RAMÓN*): You had best into the prompter's box, while I change my gown.

RAMÓN: If you need aid . . .

MARIANA (*tossing her head*): Then I will not call for you, my saucy lad.

[*She goes into the bedroom R.*

*As RAMÓN steps into the box the audience claps loudly. He holds up a modest hand.*

RAMÓN: I am but the prompter, my friends.

MAN IN CROWD: Long life to the prompter.

[*The audience claps loudly again. RAMÓN makes another bow, and lowers himself into the prompter's box.*

LOLA (*whispering*): Ester, did Lorenzo ask you anything?

ESTER: Why should I tell you what was said?

CARMEN: We would keep your words as secret as a priest at confessional.

DOÑA BERTA: What would you keep secret, miss?

CARMEN: Ester spoke with Lorenzo all alone.

DOÑA BERTA (*scandalized*): What?

DON PEPE (*startled*): Eh?

ESTER (*defensively*): Lola, Carmen and Don Esteban were here.

LOLA: But just we three. That is almost the same as being alone.

DOÑA BERTA: That is your wild advice taking root, Don Pepe.

DON PEPE: Girls and boys must speak together. How else would marriages arrange themselves?

DOÑA BERTA: When I was young, girls listened to their parents.

MAN IN CROWD: Is that why you have remained a spinster, Doña Berta?

[*Loud laughter from the crowd.*]

DRUNK IN CROWD (*sings tune of "La Cucaracha"*):

All the maidens are of gold  
And the married ones of silver.  
All the widows are of copper  
And the others merely tin.  
La cucaracha, la cucaracha . . .

DOÑA BERTA (*standing—she is furious*): Is this the gathering place of the drunks?

DON PEPE (*standing*): Take out the fool.

DRUNK: I paid my money . . .

DON PEPE (*in his most thundering voice*): What did you say?

DRUNK: I said . . . I need another drink. (*He staggers to the gate, then staggers back and shakes his finger at DOÑA BERTA, as he sings tauntingly*) And the others are of lead . . .

[DON PEPE *signals to a man in the crowd, who drags the DRUNK outside the gate and then returns to his own bench.*]

DOÑA BERTA (*reseating herself*): Such common men deserve to stay in jail, Don Pepe.

DON PEPE (*flinging out his hands*): He stays in jail so much, Doña Berta, that he keeps his clothes there and calls it his hotel. I gave him the key to his cell, yesterday. I became quite bored with locking it to keep him in, and then unlocking it to let him out.

[LORENZO *sticks his head through the curtains. There is loud applause from the audience.*]

LORENZO (*grinning and nodding his head, then to the prompter*): Ramón. (RAMÓN *sticks his head above the prompter's box.*) Can you perform on the harmonica?

RAMÓN: Alas, my only talent is for the drums.

LORENZO (*woefully*): But who will play the applause music?

MAN IN CROWD: We will sing it for you.

LORENZO: Thank you, my friend.

[*He steps in front of the curtain.*]

AUDIENCE (*sings lustily*):

Now the duck is in the pot  
Bubbling for the fire is hot,  
Lifts his head and calls for savour,  
Adds an onion for the flavour.

[*They applaud loudly.*]

LORENZO (*bowing and shaking his hands over his head to the audience*): This is a tragedy of laughter, and a comedy of tears.

MAN IN CROWD: Long live the drama !

[*Shouting and applause from the crowd.*]

LORENZO: Its story I need not tell you, for you will see it for yourselves upon the stage. We ask you to laugh where laughter is needed, and for your tears where you should weep. If you go home contented, our labour has been repaid. (*He retires behind the curtain.*)

[*More shouts and applause from the audience.*]

MARIANA *strolls in from the bedroom, dressed in a brilliant costume and with flowers in her hair.*

MARIANA: I am the heroine. Will some kind gentleman aid me to the platform ?

DON PEPE (*hastening to her*): May I be of service ? (*Whispering as he lifts her to the platform*) Was there enough to buy the goat ?

MARIANA (*laughing*): Quite enough, my friend. Thank you.

[*She disappears behind the curtain.*]

LOLA (*nervously tittering*): Oh, I am so excited.

CARMEN: Someone is pulling back the curtain.

[*ESTEBAN, a large straw hat on his head, a gaily striped blanket over one shoulder, and carrying a gun, now pulls back the curtains. There is loud applause from the audience.*]

CROWD (*sings*):

Beans and corn and sweet potatoes,  
Add a touch of red tomatoes.  
Forget your sobs and your great sorrow,  
We will all be drunk to-morrow.



[ESTEBAN strikes an heroic attitude. There is a silence. Again he strikes an attitude. Again there is silence. He leans over and knocks on the prompter's box.

RAMÓN (*popping out his head*): Eh?

ESTEBAN (*impatiently*): Well . . . begin.

RAMÓN (*blankly*): Were you ready?

ESTEBAN (*taking a deep breath*): St. Peter give me patience!  
(*Thunders*) We are ready!

RAMÓN (*lightly*): I have no book.

ESTEBAN: And you call yourself a prompter!

RAMÓN: No, a pedlar. (*Seizing the opportunity, he stands and faces the audience.*) Ladies of the audience, I have silks and satins, wedding gowns and gowns for mourning, threads and pins to make you beautiful . . .

ESTEBAN (*screaming*): Enough! (*More quietly*) This is a noble drama, not a sale of women's clothes. (*Calling through the door*) Lorenzo, the book.

LORENZO (*tossing the book through the curtains*): Here you are, Father.

[ESTEBAN hands it to RAMÓN, who sinks down into the box. Again ESTEBAN strikes an attitude.

ESTEBAN: Begin!

[*The prompter speaks rapidly in a clear, monotonous voice with the actors, but he is usually just a word ahead of them.*

ESTEBAN AND RAMÓN: I am a soldier home from war . . .

AUDIENCE: Bravo!

ESTEBAN AND RAMÓN: I am the bravest man in Mexico!

AUDIENCE: Long live the Republic! Long live Mexico!

ESTEBAN AND RAMÓN: I am returned after twenty years to see my wife and child.

MAN IN CROWD: The Revolution only lasted eight years.

ESTEBAN (*glaring at him*): Is this my war or yours?

[*Here ESTEBAN reads one speech and RAMÓN another.*

RAMÓN: How I love my beautiful wife . . .

ESTEBAN: I am returned after thirty years . . . (*He bangs on the prompter's box.*) You are ahead of me, Ramón.

RAMÓN: Did I know you were going to repeat? (*Reading*) To see my wife and son.

ESTEBAN (*exasperated*): I have already said that.

RAMÓN: Well, say it again.

LORENZO (*sticking his head through the door*): Father !

[*He crooks a finger at him.*]

ESTEBAN (*walking to the door*): Well, what do you want ?

LORENZO (*in a loud whisper*): You entered too soon. We are supposed to be ahead of you.

ESTEBAN (*who is rapidly losing his patience*): I wrote this play, and if I wish to be ahead of you, I will be first.

LORENZO: Mother says that if she does not enter now she will not act at all.

ESTEBAN (*who recognizes defeat when he sees it—sighs*): Very well. (*He comes down to the edge of the platform and speaks to the audience.*) Pretend I have not been here. I will return in a little while.

[*He goes through the door to much applause from the audience.*]

MARIANA and LORENZO enter.

MARIANA AND RAMÓN: I fear your father soon returns from the distant wars.

LORENZO AND RAMÓN: Father ? You told me that he died long years before I was born.

MARIANA AND RAMÓN: There is a weight within my breast. I have always felt it there before I saw your father.

[*Loud stamping noise behind the platform door.*]

I hear him now, the ghostly beat of horse's hoofs. (*She falls to her knees.*) Oh, Holy Virgin, save me from his wrath.

LORENZO AND RAMÓN: I will see who comes.

[*He runs out through the door.*]

MARIANA AND RAMÓN (*she beats her chest*): Ay, ay, ay.

[LORENZO enters immediately, wearing a false moustache.

LORENZO AND RAMÓN: My wife!

MARIANA AND RAMÓN: My husband!

[*They fall into each other's arms. She draws back.*

I may no longer call you husband.

LORENZO AND RAMÓN: What news is this? What sad words beat against my brain?

MARIANA AND RAMÓN: I fear Lorenzo's father does return to-day.

LORENZO AND RAMÓN: You told me he was dead.

MARIANA AND RAMÓN: And so I thought, but in the cards I read of a dark man, a dangerous man, and he is very dark, and very dangerous.

LORENZO AND RAMÓN: Your speech has stabbed me . . .

LORENZO (*in a loud whisper to RAMÓN*): Speak louder, Ramón.

[RAMÓN is laughing so hard his words are muffled.

LORENZO AND RAMÓN: My heart is rent in twain.

LORENZO (*to RAMÓN*): How can I hear you if you laugh, you fool?

[*Both begin to shout, but RAMÓN wins.*

LORENZO AND RAMÓN: I die, I die . . . I am dead!

[LORENZO stretches himself carefully out on the platform.

MARIANA AND RAMÓN: Help, help, he is dead.

[MARIANA kneels beside him. She lifts up her arms, then looks at the audience.

MARIANA: Silence, please. This is the sad speech.

MARIANA AND RAMÓN: Oh, saints in Heaven, protect me from the wrath of man. Guard in your arms this poor sweet soul whose only sin (*she gives a long sob*) . . . was loving me too much.

ESTER (*wailing*): Oh, Carmen, Lorenzo is dead!

LORENZO (*sitting up*): I will return to life if you will walk around the plaza with me.

MARIANA (*pushing him down*): Lie down, you fool. You are dead. (*To RAMÓN*) What happens next?

RAMÓN: You carry him out.

MARIANA (*in a loud whisper*): Lorenzo, this is where you go out.

[LORENZO *stands*.

Walk like a ghost. Remember, you are dead.

[LORENZO, *in as ghost-like a manner as possible, vanishes through the platform door*.

MARIANA AND RAMÓN: I am a widow once again. Oh, Heaven. Oh, Saints. Oh, Love.

[*She follows LORENZO out. ESTEBAN enters with his face turned to the side, proving that he cannot see MARIANA*.

ESTEBAN (*to the audience*): You remember that I am home, so we will continue from where I was (*he glares at the platform door*) . . . interrupted. I am ready to begin, Ramón.

ESTEBAN AND RAMÓN: I bear upon my chest the scars of war.

[*Loud applause from the audience*.

Once I was wounded . . .

[*Loud applause. ESTEBAN holds up his hand*.

ESTEBAN: You are not supposed to clap there.

ESTEBAN AND RAMÓN: Once I was wounded, but my enemy was cut to bits, and now I am home again to feast my eyes upon the beauty of my wife. (*He knocks on the door*.) Are all within here deaf?

[LORENZO *enters, without the moustache*.

LORENZO: Father! (*He falls to his knees*.)

ESTEBAN AND RAMÓN (*drawing back with dramatic surprise*): And who are you?

LORENZO AND RAMÓN: Your son.

ESTEBAN AND RAMÓN: My son? Your age?

LORENZO AND RAMÓN: Nineteen.

ESTER: Lorenzo! You told me you were twenty-two.

DON PEPE: This is a play, child, not a truth.

ESTEBAN AND RAMÓN (*with a glare for the interruption*): A son of mine nineteen, and I from home for thirty years?

MAN IN CROWD: You said twenty the first time.

ESTEBAN: Did I not write this play? If I choose to change the date then I change the date, with no advice from you!

ESTEBAN AND RAMÓN: Where hides the woman you call mother, and whom I once called wife!

ESTEBAN (*to the audience*): You can applaud for that.

[*Loud applause. ESTEBAN modestly waving his hand.*

Thank you, my friends.

ESTEBAN AND RAMÓN: Where is she?

[*MARIANA enters.*

MARIANA AND RAMÓN: Ay, Federico!

ESTEBAN AND RAMÓN: Ysabela, my love . . .

MARIANA AND RAMÓN: My husband!

[*They embrace.*

ESTEBAN AND RAMÓN (*he draws back from her*): One moment! Explain how it is that I have a son nineteen, and I from home (*he comes down and glares at THE MAN IN THE CROWD*) . . . forty years!

MARIANA AND RAMÓN: I thought that you were dead, completely dead.

ESTEBAN AND RAMÓN: Kneel down.

MARIANA AND RAMÓN (*she kneels*): I was young and beautiful, and weak to a man's whisper.

ESTEBAN AND RAMÓN: I must commune within my mind, secret and alone.

ESTEBAN (*goes down and faces the audience*): What shall I do? What would you do, my friends?

MAN IN CROWD: Shoot her!



ANOTHER MAN: Chop off her head !

DOÑA BERTA (*in a trembling voice*) : Forgive her.

ESTEBAN (*rapping on the prompter's box*) : What do I do now ?

RAMÓN: You choke her.

ESTEBAN AND RAMÓN (*returning and beginning to choke MARIANA*) : So shall all men deal with unfaithful wives.

[*Loud applause from the audience. ESTEBAN bows and goes down to the edge of the platform, shaking his own hands above his head.*]

AUDIENCE (*singing*) :

Hungry now the neighbour's look,  
Stand and wait and watch it cook.  
But, alas, they must not eat it.  
Bravo ! Bravo !!!

ESTEBAN: Thank you, my friends.

[*He goes back and finishes choking MARIANA. She falls dead.*]

ESTEBAN AND RAMÓN: So am I revenged.

[*He kicks her.*]

MARIANA (*sitting up angrily*) : That kick was not in the play !

ESTEBAN: Shh . . . lie down. You are dead.

MARIANA: Not too dead to deal with you, you ancient eater of cow's meat.

[*She reaches out and grasps one of the vases on the prompter's box and throws it at him. He ducks, and it smashes on the floor. She screams.*]

Ay, it was my own vase ! I thought it was Doña Berta's.

DOÑA BERTA (*standing*) : So I am not only insulted, but my property is destroyed as well. I stay no longer here !

[*She sweeps out of the patio with hurt dignity. The audience rises.*]

ESTEBAN (*wringing his hands*) : But the play is not finished. I have still a beautiful speech.

MARIANA (*jumping down from the platform*) : Say it alone ! I am finished with your drama.

*[She runs into the bedroom R.]*

RAMÓN (*climbing out of the prompter's box*): As for me, I prefer a good bottle of beer in the saloon. I have money, my friends. Who joins me?

*[With much cheering the audience, with the exception of DON PEPE, LOLA, CARMEN and ESTER, press forward to shake ESTEBAN's hand, and then follow RAMÓN through the gate.]*

ESTEBAN (*sitting down on the edge of the platform*): My beautiful play.

DON PEPE (*comfortingly*): It was an excellent drama, my friend. I think that we can arrange about the goat. (*To the girls*) Shall I walk home with these three pretty flowers?

LOLA (*giggling*): Ay, Don Pepe.

CARMEN: Will you tell us all about the United States?

DON PEPE (*beaming*): With the greatest of pleasure.

LORENZO (*who has worked his way around to ESTER*): Ester.

ESTER (*earnestly*): When you died I knew the truth.

LORENZO: Will you be on the plaza to-night?

ESTER (*stamping her foot*): No.

LORENZO (*crestfallen*): You . . . won't?

ESTER: Not unless you should be there too.

*[She runs out through the gate.]*

LORENZO: Ester!

*[He runs out after her.]*

DON PEPE: My three flowers have shrunk to two . . . one for each arm.

*[He extends his crooked arms and the girls take them.]*

LOLA (*as they exit through the gate*): Do they have such beautiful dramas in the United States?

*[ESTEBAN sinks his chin in his hands and takes a long sniffing breath. MARIANA enters, dressed in a bridal gown. She parades up and down in front of him.]*

ESTEBAN (*sighing*): The play is finished, but at least we have enough to buy the goat. (*He notices her for the first time.*) What are you wearing?

MARIANA: A bridal gown, which you could see if you were not so blind, my fool.

ESTEBAN: Have I seen that gown before?

MARIANA: I think not. It has only just been purchased.

[*She preens herself.*]

ESTEBAN (*springing up*): From Ramón?

[*He catches her wrist.*]

MARIANA (*pulling her hand away*): From the pedlar of silks and satins, threads and pins, to make all ladies beautiful.

ESTEBAN (*narrowing his eyes*): With what did you pay for that gown?

MARIANA (*touching her dress lightly*): With the money that I took in at the door.

ESTEBAN (*squeaking*): The money for my goat?

MARIANA: No, my love. (*She jerks the velvet from the prompter's box and holds it out towards him.*) The money to replace an ancient gown of bright red velvet.

[ESTEBAN grasps his head and moans as—]

THE CURTAINS CLOSE



Jacinto Benavente

NO SMOKING

*A Farce*

TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH  
BY JOHN GARRETT UNDERHILL



## CHARACTERS

A LADY

A YOUNG LADY

A GENTLEMAN

A CONDUCTOR

SEVERAL VOICES

*This inimitable farce was written for the celebrated comedienne and character actress, LEOCADIA ALBA.*

NOTE: When the train comes to a stop at a wayside station in Spain, the conductor calls out in a loud voice the time the train will remain there. Before it leaves, a dinner-bell is rung persistently, and the official shouts "All aboard! Passengers who are going will please take the train!" The words are often prolonged, and may be repeated any number of times. Finally the whistle blows, shrill but not loud, and the train begins to move.

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SCENE: *A compartment in a first-class railway-carriage.*

THE GENTLEMAN *is seated alone when the curtain rises.*

A VOICE (*outside*): Three minutes! The train stops three minutes!

ANOTHER VOICE: Water! Fresh water! Who wants water?

ANOTHER VOICE: Here, girl! Water!

[*The LADY and THE YOUNG LADY enter.*

LADY: Hurry up; it only stops a minute. I thought we'd die in that compartment. See if we have everything. One, two . . . Where's the basket? The basket!

YOUNG LADY: Here it is, Mamma.

LADY: Gracious! What a fright you did give me! The one thing, too, your aunt asked us to bring with us— She would always have insisted that we lost it on purpose.— Good afternoon.

GENTLEMAN: Good afternoon. I beg your pardon, but as I was riding alone, although it says "No Smoking" . . .

LADY: For goodness' sake, don't stop upon our account! Smoke as much as you want to—it doesn't bother me, or my daughter, either. We are used to it. Her poor father, my first husband—who is now in glory—was never without a cigar in his mouth. As he bit off one, he lit it with the butt of the other. And my second husband—who now rests in peace—they were alike as two buttons; you could scarcely tell the difference. I had a difficulty at one time myself, a suffocating feeling, all stuffed up here—terrible distress—and the doctors were telling me that it was asthma and that it wasn't asthma— Well, I smoked then myself—aromatic cigarettes—which didn't do me any good, either, by the way, I can say that. So you see as far as we are concerned . . . My dear, what on earth are you doing with that

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basket? Don't you see that you've got it with the holes against the wall, and the poor animal will be smothered to death? It's a cat, yes, sir, an aunt of my daughter's—she requested us to bring it with us, as a favour to her. She is my sister-in-law. It began to howl the moment the conductor came after the tickets, and this poor child had to sit there and sing and laugh so as to drown it—so the conductor couldn't tell who was howling. I should say it was a favour!

A VOICE (*outside*): All aboard! Passengers who are going will please take the train!

LADY: Good! They are afraid we might be left behind. However, we are off now—— But you needn't think you are inconveniencing us. You can't annoy us by smoking. Before we changed we were travelling in the ladies' compartment, and we transferred to this one as soon as we could because there were people in it one simply couldn't travel with; they were out of the question. You would think that people who travelled first class would have manners, that they would know something. But not a bit of it! Believe me, if you want to find out what people are like, play cards with them, or watch them eat, or else go travelling. You'll find out then soon enough. There was a woman in that compartment—I say she was a woman because I don't know what else to call her—with her companion—she must have been her companion, she was with her anyway—well, I can tell you I was mortified. I was ashamed—such a conversation! Between the two of them! They might as well have been sitting in their own parlours. As far as that goes, you know, speaking for myself, a widow twice, it was nothing to me; but before my daughter . . . I had to make her sit with her head out of the window all the way. It was pretty chilly for her. You can see for yourself she has taken cold. And she's got a cinder in her eye, too—worse luck! Her eyes are the best part of her.

YOUNG LADY: For mercy's sake, Mamma! What will this gentleman think? I hope you don't mind Mamma.

LADY: Keep quiet, for heaven's sake! Such women! And they didn't stop there. One of them, tired of gabbing, I suppose, takes out a book if you please, and settles herself

down to read. And what a book ! There was a woman on the cover in her chemise, fanning herself.

GENTLEMAN: Evidently hot . . .

LADY: You needn't tell me it was hot.

[THE GENTLEMAN, *with a detached air, reaches for a book which has been lying on the seat beside him.*

GENTLEMAN: You cannot always be sure. Sometimes the publishers—so as to attract attention—— And then it turns out that there is nothing in the book, after all.

LADY: You needn't tell me. Why, didn't she begin to laugh right out loud, and the other one wanted to know what she was laughing at ? And she started in to read to her, at the top of her voice. It was too much for me this time. There we sat in that compartment, helpless, wondering what was coming next. I made up my mind I'd have to ask them to show some consideration for the girl. I'd better have held my tongue ! How they did go for us ! I didn't ring the alarm and stop the train because I was too excited. It isn't safe to travel with people who begin to gabble and talk the minute they lay eyes on you, and tell you all their private affairs just as if you were one of the family. People ought to be careful what they say. The very least that happens is that they tell you some scandal or dishonesty or something of the sort about Mr. So-and-So—that he is this way or that he is that way, and the next thing you know he turns out to be your father. And a person who would talk like that about your father, what wouldn't he say about your uncle or your cousins or anyone else in the family ? And there you are !

[THE CONDUCTOR *enters.*

CONDUCTOR: Good afternoon.

LADY: The tickets, child ! What have you done with the tickets ?

YOUNG LADY: Why, you have them, Mamma !

LADY: No, my dear ; I gave them to you—the last time they came round. I am so sorry—— (*The cat begins to howl.*) My dear ! (*THE YOUNG LADY begins to sing.*) I can't find them ; you must have them. What's that ? Ah, yes ! Of course ! Wait a minute. Here they are——

CONDUCTOR: Thank you. Good afternoon.

*[He goes out.]*

YOUNG LADY: What did you ask me for? You knew perfectly well that I couldn't stop singing.

LADY: I wonder what that animal has against the conductor? I told you it was a nuisance; now judge for yourself. If it wasn't that my relations with my sister-in-law are a little bit strained—you understand—I don't want to give her a chance to do any talking—— Well, the fact is she wasn't pleased because I married a second time. Just as if I would be likely to forget my first husband any sooner on that account! Put yourself in my place. Suppose you had been a widow of twenty-six without any visible means of support, and the man who was in love with you, without any offence to his predecessor, without reflecting upon his merits in the least, was the best man in the world—I ought to have known, though, that it couldn't last. Something was sure to happen—— Good Lord! What's the matter?

GENTLEMAN: We are coming to a tunnel.

LADY: Horrors!

*[They pass into a tunnel. After a moment they come out.]*

Don't look at that gentleman. I was the one who pinched you on the arm——

GENTLEMAN: Madam!

LADY: But that was not all. My sister-in-law is of a very domineering disposition. She is the moneyed member of the family, and, naturally, she expects everybody to bow down before her. She wants them to grovel. Well, that isn't my style. If I say anything she doesn't like, it results in an explosion. Now she has set herself on marrying my daughter to a nephew of hers about whom we know absolutely nothing. It is a delicate subject. A woman only marries once; at least, the first time that is all that she counts on. She plans no further ahead. She says he is a nice fellow, but I have made inquiries—— Look out of the window, my dear—— I hear he is very fond of the ladies. But what of that? All men are alike. Would you believe it, when we



had been married only eight days, I surprised my first husband kissing the nurse?

GENTLEMAN: Did you have a nurse when you had been married only eight days?

LADY: For my little sister. For heaven's sake, what did you think?

YOUNG LADY: Mamma! Mamma! Look at all the little rabbits!

LADY: Don't talk to me about little rabbits. You can take your head in now. We were discussing your fiancé.

YOUNG LADY: What does this gentleman think?

LADY: He thinks the same as I do. He says that without knowing him thoroughly—— And he is perfectly right——

GENTLEMAN (*aside*): Where did this woman get the idea that I said anything?

LADY: Are we coming to a stop?

YOUNG LADY: Yes, we are stopping now. That was a long run, Mamma.

GENTLEMAN: I believe I shall get out and stretch myself for a moment. With your permission, ladies——

LADY: Be sure you have time enough.

GENTLEMAN: Yes, the engine takes in water.

[THE GENTLEMAN *goes out*.

A VOICE (*outside*): Two minutes! The train stops two minutes!

ANOTHER VOICE: Water! Who wants water?

ANOTHER VOICE: Buy your cinnamon cakes! Cinnamon cakes.

YOUNG LADY: Mamma, I want some cinnamon cakes.

LADY: Didn't I tell you when you were travelling to be careful what you ate? We've had spice enough already. We're a great deal better off in this compartment. That

seems to be a very nice gentleman. Probably he is taking a little vacation—— I think we saw him in Madrid one afternoon with a fat lady, that day we were at the Lyric to see “The Iron Ring.” Don’t you remember the woman who sat in front of us with the big hat, so that you couldn’t see? She cried through all the sad parts.

YOUNG LADY: I don’t remember, Mamma.

LADY: When I get a good look at a person I never forget. I’ll ask him when he comes back.

VOICES: All aboard! Passengers who are going will please take the train!

LADY: Goodness, there’s the bell! The gentleman hasn’t come back—— See if he’s on the platform—— Can’t you see him?

YOUNG LADY: No.

LADY: Here! Stop! Don’t start the train! There’s a gentleman missing!—I wonder where he can be? The train is moving—— He’s left—— What can the matter be? Too bad! What a pity!

YOUNG LADY: He hasn’t moved to another compartment. Here are his things.

LADY: Of course he hasn’t. We had better throw them out of the window. He can pick them up on the platform. It’s the best we can do for him.

YOUNG LADY: Yes! It’s the best.

LADY: Help me! Hurry up!

YOUNG LADY: There they go!

LADY: They belong to a gentleman who has lost the train! Keep them for him! He’ll be out in a minute!—Didn’t he know that the train doesn’t wait for anybody? I am so sorry!

YOUNG LADY: We forgot the book.

LADY: Never mind; it’s all right. It won’t be like the other one, anyhow—— What a pity!

YOUNG LADY (*looking at the book*): What a book !

LADY: If there isn't another train to-day and his family should be waiting for him and he should be ashamed to let them know—— I hate to think of it ! It's too horrible for words !

YOUNG LADY (*giggling*): Too horrible !

LADY: God bless me ! It's too bad. While he was here, we had an escort, as it were. We were having a very agreeable conversation. It was easy to see he had acquired a great deal of information.

YOUNG LADY: He was very good looking. Listen, Mamma ; where did you say that you pinched me in the tunnel ? On the arm ?

LADY: What do you want to know that for ?

YOUNG LADY: Nothing. Because it hurts.

LADY: I am so nervous ; I'm always afraid of those tunnels. You never can tell what is going to happen in a tunnel. However, it's too late now for regrets—— Don't you feel hungry ?

YOUNG LADY: I should say I do. It always gives me an appetite to ride on the train.

LADY: If you travelled more maybe you'd pick up faster. Now you look like half a Philopena—— Hand me down the basket—— Better see how the cat is.

YOUNG LADY: Hello, kitty ! Puss ! Puss ! My, what eyes ! They shine like fire.

LADY: I'm thankful it hasn't given us any trouble, though. It's time to eat.

YOUNG LADY: Another stop.

LADY: Good. We can spread the things out now.

A VOICE: One minute ! One minute !

ANOTHER VOICE: Water ! Who wants water ?

LADY: These breaded chops ought to taste good. Spread the paper for a cloth—— Give me a napkin—— Don't upset the wine bottle——

[THE GENTLEMAN *re-enters*.

GENTLEMAN: I beg your pardon, ladies——

LADY: Eh?

YOUNG LADY: Oh!

LADY: What! You again?

GENTLEMAN: Yes, I was riding in the smoking-car.

LADY: But weren't you left behind?

YOUNG LADY: We thought——

GENTLEMAN: But my luggage? How is this?

LADY: Oh! I beg your pardon!

YOUNG LADY: You see——

LADY: We thought you had missed the train, and, so as to oblige you——

YOUNG LADY: We threw it out of the window.

GENTLEMAN: Who told you to do that?

LADY: To accommodate you——

YOUNG LADY: How were we to suppose——

GENTLEMAN: But what am I to do now? The devil! These women—— I ought to have known that you would be up to something!

LADY: If you are going to take it like this, sir——

GENTLEMAN: How the devil do you expect me to take it?

LADY: Why didn't you tell us what you were going to do?

GENTLEMAN: Every time I go out do I have to hold up my hand to you? If you weren't irresponsible——

LADY: I don't allow gentlemen to call me irresponsible; nor my daughter, either. Where are your manners?

GENTLEMAN: Madam! I have lost my bags!

LADY: You don't know what you are talking about. You are the one who is irresponsible.

GENTLEMAN: I?

LADY: Yes! You're mad! You're crazy!

YOUNG LADY: Why, Mamma!

VOICE: Passengers who are going will please take the train!  
All aboard!

LADY: You can telegraph when we get to the next station.

GENTLEMAN: I can, can I?—My bags! My bags!

LADY: A lady ought never to travel without a private compartment.

GENTLEMAN: Oh, travel in the baggage-car!

LADY: I? In the baggage-car?

GENTLEMAN: Muzzled. On a chain!

YOUNG LADY: Mamma! Mamma!

*[All talk at the same time.]*

CURTAIN





Anton Chekhov

THE PROPOSAL

*A Jest*

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN  
BY CONSTANCE GARNETT

## CHARACTERS

STEPAN STEPANOVITCH TCHUBUKOV – a landowner

NATALYA STEPANOVNA – his daughter, aged 25

IVAN VASSILYEVITCH LOMOV – a neighbour of Tchubukov's,  
a healthy, well-nourished, but hypochondriacal land-  
owner

*Drawing-room in TCHUBUKOV's house. TCHUBUKOV and LOMOV; the latter enters wearing evening dress and white gloves.*

TCHUBUKOV (*going to meet him*): My darling, whom do I see? Ivan Vassilyevitch! Delighted! (*Shakes hands.*) Well, this is a surprise, dearie. . . . How are you?

LOMOV: I thank you. And pray, how are you?

TCHUBUKOV: We are getting on all right, thanks to your prayers, my angel, and all the rest of it. Please sit down. . . . It's too bad, you know, to forget your neighbours, darling. But, my dear, why this ceremoniousness? A swallow-tail, gloves, and all the rest of it! Are you going visiting, my precious?

LOMOV: No, I have only come to see you, honoured Stepan Stepanovitch.

TCHUBUKOV: Then why the swallow-tail, my charmer? As though you were paying calls on New Year's Day!

LOMOV: You see, this is how it is. (*Takes his arm.*) I have come, honoured Stepan Stepanovitch, to trouble you with a request. I have more than once had the honour of asking for your assistance, and you have always, so to speak—but pardon me, I am agitated. I will have a drink of water, honoured Stepan Stepanovitch.

[*Drinks water.*]

TCHUBUKOV (*aside*): Come to ask for money! I am not going to give it to him. (*To him*) What is it, my beauty?

LOMOV: You see, Honour Stepanovitch—I beg your pardon, Stepan Honouritch. . . . I am dreadfully agitated, as you see. In short, no one but you can assist me, though, of course, I have done nothing to deserve it, and . . . and . . . have no right to reckon upon your assistance. . . .

TCHUBUKOV: Oh, don't spin it out, dearie. Come to the point. Well?

LOMOV: Immediately—in a moment. The fact is that I have come to ask for the hand of your daughter, Natalya Stepanovna.

TCHUBUKOV (*joyfully*): You precious darling ! Ivan Vassiljevitch, say it again ! I can't believe my ears.

LOMOV: I have the honour to ask . . .

TCHUBUKOV (*interrupting*): My darling ! I am delighted, and all the rest of it. Yes, indeed, and all that sort of thing. (*Embraces and kisses him.*) I have been hoping for it for ages. It has always been my wish. (*Sheds a tear.*) And I have always loved you, my angel, as though you were my own son. God give you both love and good counsel, and all the rest of it. I have always wished for it. . . . Why am I standing here like a post ? I am stupefied with joy, absolutely stupefied ! Oh, from the bottom of my heart. . . . I'll go and call Natasha and that sort of thing.

LOMOV (*touched*): Honoured Stepan Stepanovitch, what do you think ? May I hope that she will accept me ?

TCHUBUKOV: A beauty like you, and she not accept you ! I'll be bound she is as love-sick as a cat, and all the rest of it. . . . In a minute.

[*Goes out.*]

LOMOV: I am cold—I am trembling all over, as though I were in for an examination. The great thing is to make up one's mind. If one thinks about it too long, hesitates, discusses it, waits for one's ideal or for real love, one will never get married. . . . Brr ! I am cold. Natalya Stepanovna is an excellent manager, not bad looking, educated—what more do I want ? But I am beginning to have noises in my head. I am so upset. (*Sips water.*) And get married I must. To begin with, I am thirty-five—a critical age, so to speak. And, secondly, I need a regular, well-ordered life. . . . I have valvular disease of the heart, continual palpitations. I am hasty, and am very easily upset. . . . Now, for instance, my lips are quivering and my right eyelid is twitching. . . . But my worst trouble is with sleep. No sooner have I got into bed and just begun to drop asleep, than I have a shooting pain in my left side and a stabbing at my shoulder and my head. . . . I leap up like a madman. I walk about a little and lie down again, but no sooner do I drop off than there's the shooting pain in my side again. And the same thing twenty times over ! . . .



[Enter NATALYA STEPANOVNA.]

NATALYA: Well, so it's you ! Why, and papa said a purchaser had come for the goods ! How do you do, Ivan Vassilyevitch ?

LOMOV: How do you do, honoured Natalya Stepanovna !

NATALYA: Excuse my apron and *négligé*. We are shelling peas for drying. How is it you have not been to see us for so long ? Sit down. (*They sit down.*) Will you have some lunch ?

LOMOV: No, thank you, I have already lunched.

NATALYA: Won't you smoke ? Here are the matches. . . . It's a magnificent day, but yesterday it rained so hard that the men did no work at all. How many hay-cocks have you got out ? Only fancy, I have been too eager and had the whole meadow mown, and now I am sorry—I am afraid the hay will rot. It would have been better to wait. But what's this ? I do believe you have got on your dress-coat ! That's something new. Are you going to a ball, or what ? And, by the way, you are looking nice. . . . Why are you such a swell, really ?

LOMOV (*in agitation*): You see, honoured Natalya Stepanovna. . . . The fact is that I have made up my mind to ask you to listen to me. . . . Of course, you will be surprised, and even angry, but I . . . It's horribly cold !

NATALYA: What is it ? (*A pause.*) Well ?

LOMOV: I will try to be brief. You are aware, honoured Natalya Stepanovna, that from my earliest childhood I had the honour of knowing your family. My late aunt and her husband, from whom, as you know, I inherited the estate, always entertained a profound respect for your papa and your late mamma. The family of the Lomovs and the family of the Tchubukovs have always been on the most friendly and, one may say, intimate terms. Moreover, as you are aware, my land is in close proximity to yours. If you remember, my Volovyi meadows are bounded by your birch copse.

NATALYA: Excuse my interrupting you. You say "*my* Volovyi meadows." . . . But are they yours ?

LOMOV: Yes, mine.

NATALYA: Well, what next ! The Volovyi meadows are ours, not yours !

LOMOV: No, they are mine, honoured Natalya Stepanovna.

NATALYA: That's news to me. How do they come to be yours ?

LOMOV: How do they come to be mine ? I am speaking of the Volovyi meadows that run like a wedge between your birch copse and the Charred Swamp.

NATALYA: Quite so. Those are ours.

LOMOV: No, you are mistaken, honoured Natalya Stepanovna, they are mine.

NATALYA: Think what you are saying, Ivan Vassilyevitch ! Have they been yours long ?

LOMOV: What do you mean by " long " ? As long as I can remember they have always been ours.

NATALYA: Well, there you must excuse me.

LOMOV: There is documentary evidence for it, honoured Natalya Stepanovna. The Volovyi meadows were once a matter of dispute, that is true, but now everyone knows that they are mine. And there can be no dispute about it. Kindly consider . . . my aunt's grandmother gave over those meadows to the peasants of your father's grandfather for their use, rent free, for an indefinite period, in return for their firing her bricks. The peasants of your father's grandfather enjoyed the use of the meadows, rent free, for some forty years, and grew used to looking upon them as their own ; afterwards, when the settlement came about after the emancipation . . .

NATALYA: It is not at all as you say ! Both my grandfather and my great-grandfather considered their land reached to the Charred Swamp—so the Volovyi meadows were ours. I can't understand what there is to argue about. It's really annoying !

LOMOV: I will show you documents, Natalya Stepanovna.

NATALYA: No, you are simply joking, or trying to tease me. . . . A nice sort of surprise ! We have owned the land

nearly three hundred years, and all of a sudden we are told that the land is not ours ! Forgive me, Ivan Vassilyevitch, but I positively cannot believe my ears. . . . I don't care about the meadows. They are not more than fifteen acres, and they are only worth some three hundred roubles, but I am revolted by injustice. You may say what you like, but I cannot endure injustice !

LOMOV: Listen to me, I implore you. The peasants of your father's grandfather, as I had already the honour to inform you, made bricks for my aunt's grandmother. My aunt's grandmother, wishing to do something for them . . .

NATALYA: Grandfather, grandmother, aunt. . . . I don't understand a word of it. The meadows are ours, and that's all about it.

LOMOV: They are mine.

NATALYA: They are ours. If you go on arguing for two days, if you put on fifteen dress coats, they are still ours, ours, ours ! . . . I don't want what's yours, but I don't want to lose what's mine. . . . You can take that as you please !

LOMOV: I do not care about the meadows, Natalya Stepanovna, but it is a matter of principle. If you like, I will make you a present of them.

NATALYA: I might make you a present of them, they are mine. All this is very queer, Ivan Vassilyevitch, to say the least of it. Hitherto we have looked upon you as a good neighbour—a friend. Last year we lent you our threshing-machine, and through that we couldn't finish our threshing till November ; and you treat us as if we were gypsies ! Make me a present of my own land ! Excuse me, but that is not neighbourly. To my thinking it is positively impertinent, if you care to know. . . .

LOMOV: According to you I am a usurper, then ? I've never snatched other people's land, madam, and I will allow no one to accuse me of such a thing. . . . (*Goes rapidly to the decanter and drinks water.*) The Volovyi meadows are mine !

NATALYA: It's not true: they are ours !

LOMOV: They are mine !

NATALYA: That's not true. I'll prove it. I'll send our mowers to cut the hay there to-day !

LOMOV: What ?

NATALYA: My labourers will be there to-day.

LOMOV: I'll kick them out.

NATALYA: Don't you dare !

LOMOV (*clutches at his heart*): The Volovyi meadows are mine ! Do you understand ? Mine !

NATALYA: Don't shout, please. You can shout and choke with rage when you are at home, if you like ; but here I beg you to keep within bounds.

LOMOV: If it were not for these terrible, agonizing palpitations, madam—if it were not for the throbbing in my temples, I should speak to you very differently. (*Shouts*) The Volovyi meadows are mine !

NATALYA: Ours !

LOMOV: Mine !

NATALYA: Ours !

LOMOV: Mine !

[*Enter TCHUBUKOV.*

TCHUBUKOV: What is it ? What are you shouting about ?

NATALYA: Papa, explain to this gentleman, please: to whom do the Volovyi meadows belong—to him or to us ?

TCHUBUKOV (*to LOMOV*): My chicken, the meadows are ours.

LOMOV: But upon my word, Stepan Stepanovitch, how did they come to be yours ? Do you, at least, be reasonable. My aunt's grandmother gave over the meadows for temporary gratuitous use to your grandfather's peasants. The peasants made use of the land for forty years and got used to regarding it as their own ; but when the Settlement came . . .

TCHUBUKOV: Allow me, my precious. . . . You forget that the peasants did not pay your grandmother rent and all



the rest of it, just because the ownership of the land was in dispute, and so on. . . . And now every dog knows that they are ours. You can't have seen the map.

LOMOV: I will prove to you that they are mine.

TCHUBUKOV: You never will, my pet.

LOMOV: Yes, I will.

TCHUBUKOV: Why are you shouting, my love? You will prove nothing at all by shouting. I don't desire what is yours, and don't intend to give up what is mine. Why ever should I? If it comes to that, my dear, if you intend to wrangle over the meadows, I would rather give them to the peasants than to you, that I would!

LOMOV: I don't understand it. What right have you to give away another man's property?

TCHUBUKOV: Allow me to decide for myself whether I have the right or no. I may say, young man, I am not accustomed to being spoken to in that tone, and all the rest of it. I am twice as old as you are, young man, and I beg you to speak to me without getting excited and all the rest of it.

LOMOV: Why, you simply take me for a fool and are laughing at me! You call my land yours, and then you expect me to be cool about it and to speak to you properly! That's not the way good neighbours behave, Stepan Stepanovitch. You are not a neighbour, but a usurper!

TCHUBUKOV: What? What did you say?

NATALYA: Papa, send the men at once to mow the meadows.

TCHUBUKOV (*to LOMOV*): What did you say, sir?

NATALYA: The Volovyi meadows are ours, and I won't give them up. I won't! I won't!

LOMOV: We will see about that. I'll prove to you in court that they are mine.

TCHUBUKOV: In court? You can take it into court, sir, and all the rest of it! You can! I know you—you are only waiting for a chance to go to law, and so on. . . . A pettifogging character! All your family were fond of litigation—all of them!



LOMOV: I beg you not to insult my family. The Lomovs have all been honest men, and not one of them has ever been on his trial for embezzling money like your uncle !

TCHUBUKOV: Well, you Lomovs have all been mad !

NATALYA: Everyone of them—everyone of them !

TCHUBUKOV: Your grandfather was a dipsomaniac, and your youngest aunt, Nastasya Mihailovna, ran away with an architect, and so on.

LOMOV: And your mother was a hunchback. (*Clutches at his heart.*) The shooting pain in my side ! . . . The blood has rushed to my head. . . . Holy Saints ! . . . Water !

TCHUBUKOV: And your father was a gambler and a glutton !

NATALYA: And there was no one like your aunt for talking scandal !

LOMOV: My left leg has all gone numb. . . . And you are an intriguer ! . . . Oh, my heart ! . . . And it is no secret that before the elections you . . . There are flashes before my eyes ! . . . Where is my hat ?

NATALYA: It's mean ! It's dishonest ! It's disgusting !

TCHUBUKOV: And you yourself are a viperish, double-faced, mischief-making man. Yes, indeed !

LOMOV: Here is my hat. . . . My heart ! . . . Which way am I to go ? Where's the door ? Oh ! I believe I am dying. I've lost the use of my leg.

*[Goes towards the door.]*

TCHUBUKOV (*calling after him*): Never set foot within my door again !

NATALYA: Take it into court ! We shall see !

*[LOMOV goes out, staggering.]*

TCHUBUKOV: Damnation take him !

*[Walks about in excitement.]*

NATALYA: What a wretch ! How is one to believe in good neighbours after that !

TCHUBUKOV: Blackguard ! Scarecrow !

NATALYA: The object ! Collars other people's land—then abuses them !

TCHUBUKOV: And that noodle—that eyesore—had the face to make a proposal, and all the rest of it. Just fancy, a proposal !

NATALYA: What proposal ?

TCHUBUKOV: Why, he came here on purpose to propose to you !

NATALYA: To propose ? To me ? Why didn't you tell me so before ?

TCHUBUKOV: And he had got himself up in his dress coat on purpose ! The sausage ! The shrimp !

NATALYA: To me ? A proposal ! Ah ! (*She falls into an arm-chair and moans*) Bring him back ! Bring him back ! Oh, bring him back !

TCHUBUKOV: Bring whom back ?

NATALYA: Make haste, make haste ! I feel faint ! Bring him back !

[*Hysterics.*]

TCHUBUKOV: What is it ! What's the matter ? (*Clutches at his head.*) I do have a life of it ! I shall shoot myself ! I shall hang myself ! They'll be the death of me !

NATALYA: I am dying ! Bring him back !

TCHUBUKOV: Tfoo ! Directly. Don't howl. (*Runs off.*)

NATALYA (*alone, moans*): What have we done ! Bring him back ! Bring him back !

TCHUBUKOV (*runs in*): He is just coming in, and all the rest of it. Damnation take him ! Ough ! Talk to him yourself, I don't want to. . . .

NATALYA (*moans*): Bring him back !

TCHUBUKOV (*shouts*): He is coming, I tell you ! What a task it is, O Lord, to be the father of a grown-up daughter ! I shall cut my throat ! I shall certainly cut my throat ! We've abused the man, put him to shame, kicked him out, and it is all your doing—your doing !

NATALYA: No, it was yours !

TCHUBUKOV: Oh, it's my fault, so that's it ! (LOMOV *appears at the door.*) Well, talk to him yourself.

[*He goes out. Enter LOMOV in a state of collapse.*]

LOMOV: Fearful palpitations ! My leg is numb . . . there's a stitch in my side. . . .

NATALYA: Forgive us; we were too hasty, Ivan Vassilyevitch. I remember now: the Volovyi meadows really are yours.

LOMOV: My heart is throbbing frightfully. . . . The meadows are mine. . . . There's a twitching in both my eyelids.

NATALYA: Yes, they are yours, they are. Sit down. (*They sit down.*) We were wrong.

LOMOV: I acted from principle. . . . I do not value the land, but I value the principle. . . .

NATALYA: Just so, the principle. . . . Let us talk of something else.

LOMOV: Especially as I have proofs. My aunt's grandmother gave the peasants of your father's grandfather . . .

NATALYA: Enough, enough about that. . . . (*Aside*) I don't know how to begin. (*To him*) Shall you soon be going shooting ?

LOMOV: I expect to go grouse shooting after the harvest, honoured Natalya Stepanovna. Oh ! did you hear ? Only fancy, I had such a misfortune ! My Tracker, whom I think you know, has fallen lame.

NATALYA: What a pity ! How did it happen ?

LOMOV: I don't know. . . . He must have put his paw out of joint, or perhaps some other dog bit it. . . . (*Sighs.*) My very best dog, to say nothing of the money I have spent on him ! You know I paid Mironov a hundred and twenty-five roubles for him.

NATALYA: You gave too much, Ivan Vassilyevitch !

LOMOV: Well, to my mind it was very cheap. He is a delightful dog.

NATALYA: Father gave eighty-five roubles for his Backer, and Backer is a much better dog than your Tracker.

LOMOV: Backer a better dog than Tracker? What nonsense! (*Laughs.*) Backer a better dog than Tracker!

NATALYA: Of course he is better. It's true that Backer is young yet—he is hardly a full-grown dog—but for points and cleverness even Voltchanetsky hasn't one to beat him.

LOMOV: Excuse me, Natalya Stepanovna, but you forget that your Backer has a pug-jaw, and a dog with a pug-jaw is never any good for gripping.

NATALYA: A pug-jaw! That's the first time I've heard so.

LOMOV: I assure you the lower jaw is shorter than the upper.

NATALYA: Why, have you measured?

LOMOV: Yes. He is all right for coursing, no doubt, but for gripping he'd hardly do.

NATALYA: In the first place, our Backer is a pedigree dog, son of Harness and Chisel, but you can't even tell what breed your spotty piebald is. . . . Then he is as old and ugly as a broken-down horse.

LOMOV: He is old, but I wouldn't exchange him for half a dozen of your Backers. . . . How could I? Tracker is a dog, but Backer—there can be no question about it. Every huntsman has packs and packs of dogs like your Backer. Twenty-five roubles would be a good price for him.

NATALYA: There is a demon of contradictoriness in you to-day, Ivan Vassilyevitch. First you make out that the meadows are yours, then that your Tracker is a better dog than Backer. I don't like a man to say what he does not think. You know perfectly well that Backer is worth a hundred of your . . . stupid Trackers. Why, then, say the opposite?

LOMOV: I see, Natalya Stepanovna, that you think I am blind or a fool. Do you understand that your Backer has a pug-jaw?

NATALYA: It's not true!

LOMOV: It is !

NATALYA (*shouts*): It's not true !

LOMOV: Why are you shouting, madam ?

NATALYA: Why do you talk nonsense ? This is revolting ! It's time your Tracker was shot—and you compare him to Backer !

LOMOV: Excuse me, I cannot continue this argument. I have palpitations.

NATALYA: I have noticed that men argue most about hunting who know least about it.

LOMOV: Madam, I beg you to be silent. My heart is bursting. (*Shouts*) Be silent !

NATALYA: I will not be silent till you own that Backer is a hundred times better than your Tracker.

LOMOV: A hundred times worse ! Plague take your Backer ! My temples . . . my eyes . . . my shoulder. . . .

NATALYA: There's no need for plague to take your fool of a Tracker—he is as good as dead already.

LOMOV (*weeping*): Be silent ! My heart is bursting !

NATALYA: I won't be silent.

[*Enter TCHUBUKOV.*

TCHUBUKOV (*coming in*): What now ?

NATALYA: Papa, tell me truly, on your conscience, which is the better dog—our Backer or his Tracker ?

LOMOV: Stepan Stepanovitch, I implore you tell me one thing only: has your Backer a pug-jaw or not ? Yes or no ?

TCHUBUKOV: And what if he has ? It's of no consequence. Anyway, there's no better dog in the whole district, and all the rest of it.

LOMOV: But my Tracker is better, isn't he ? Honestly ?

TCHUBUKOV: Don't excite yourself, my precious. Your Tracker certainly has his good qualities. . . . He is a well-bred dog, has good legs, and is well set-up, and all the rest of it. But the dog, if you care to know, my beauty, has two serious defects: he is old and is snub-nosed.



LOMOV: Excuse me, I have palpitations. . . . Let us take the facts. . . . If you will kindly remember, at Maruskin's my Tracker kept shoulder to shoulder with the Count's Swinger, while your Backer was a good half-mile behind.

TCHUBUKOV: Yes, he was, because the Count's huntsman gave him a crack with his whip.

LOMOV: He deserved it. All the other dogs were after the fox, but Backer got hold of a sheep.

TCHUBUKOV: That's not true ! . . . Darling, I am hot-tempered, and I beg you to drop this conversation. He lashed him because everyone is jealous of another man's dog. . . . Yes, they are all envious ! And you are not free from blame on that score either, sir. As soon as you notice, for instance, that someone's dog is better than your Tracker, at once you begin with this and that, and all the rest of it. I remember it all !

LOMOV: I remember it too !

TCHUBUKOV (*mimics him*): " I remember it too ! " And what do you remember ?

LOMOV: Palpitations ! . . . My leg has no feeling in it. I can't . . .

NATALYA (*mimicking him*): " Palpitations ! " . . . A fine sportsman ! You ought to be lying on the stove in the kitchen squashing blackbeetles instead of hunting foxes. Palpitations !

TCHUBUKOV: Yes, you are a fine sportsman, really ! With your palpitations you ought to stay at home, instead of jolting in the saddle. It wouldn't matter if you hunted, but you only ride out to wrangle and interfere with other men's dogs and all the rest of it. I am hot-tempered ; let us drop this subject. You are not a sportsman at all.

LOMOV: And you—are you a sportsman ? You only go to the hunt to intrigue and make up to the Count. . . . My heart ! . . . You are an intriguer !

TCHUBUKOV: What ? Me an intriguer ? (*Shouts*) Hold your tongue !

LOMOV: Intriguer !

TCHUBUKOV: Milksop ! Puppy !

LOMOV: Old rat ! Jesuit !

TCHUBUKOV: Hold your tongue, or I'll shoot you with a filthy gun like a partridge ! Noodle !

LOMOV: Everyone knows—oh, my heart !—that your wife used to beat you. . . . My leg . . . my forehead . . . my eyes ! . . . I shall drop ! I shall drop !

TCHUBUKOV: And you go in terror of your housekeeper !

LOMOV: Oh, oh, oh ! My heart has burst ! I can't feel my shoulder—what has become of my shoulder ? I am dying !  
(*Falls into an armchair.*) A doctor !

[*Swoons.*]

TCHUBUKOV: Puppy ! Milksop ! Noodle ! I feel faint !  
(*Drinks water.*) Faint !

NATALYA: You are a fine sportsman ! You don't know how to sit on your horse. (*To her father*) Papa, what's the matter with him ? Papa ! Look, papa ! (*Shrieks.*) Ivan Vassilyevitch ! He is dead !

TCHUBUKOV: I feel faint ! I can't breathe ! Give me air !

NATALYA: He is dead ! (*Shakes LOMOV by the sleeve.*) Ivan Vassilyevitch ! Ivan Vassilyevitch ! What have we done ! He is dead ! (*Falls into an armchair.*) A doctor ! a doctor !

[*Hysterics.*]

TCHUBUKOV: Och ! What is it ? What do you want ?

NATALYA (*moans*): He is dead ! He is dead !

TCHUBUKOV: Who is dead ? (*Looking at LOMOV*) He really is dead ! Holy Saints ! Water ! A doctor ! (*Holds a glass of water to LOMOV's lips.*) Drink ! . . . No, he won't drink. So he is dead, and all the rest of it. I do have a life of it ! Why don't I put a bullet through my brains ? Why is it I haven't cut my throat ? What am I waiting for ? Give me a knife ! Give me a pistol ! (*LOMOV makes a slight movement.*) I believe he is reviving. . . . Have a drink of water. That's right.

LOMOV: Flashes—dizziness—where am I ?

TCHUBUKOV: You'd better make haste and get married—and go to the devil ! She consents. (*Joins the hands of LOMOV*

*and his daughter.*) She accepts you, and all the rest of it. I give you my blessing, and so on. Only leave me in peace.

LOMOV: Eh? What? (*Getting up*) Who?

TCHUBUKOV: She accepts you. Well? Kiss each other and . . . be damned to you!

NATALYA (*moans*): He is alive! Yes, yes, I accept.

TCHUBUKOV: Kiss!

LOMOV: Eh? Whom? (*Kisses NATALYA STEPANOVNA.*) Delighted! Excuse me, what's the point? Oh, yes, I understand! Palpitations . . . dizziness . . . I am happy, Natalya Stepanovna. (*Kisses her hand.*) My leg is numb!

NATALYA: I . . . I too am happy.

TCHUBUKOV: But . . . still you must admit now that Tracker is not as good a dog as Backer.

LOMOV: He is better!

NATALYA: He is worse!

TCHUBUKOV: Well, here's the beginning of family happiness! Champagne!

LOMOV: He is better!

NATALYA: He is not! He is not! He is not!

TCHUBUKOV (*trying to shout them down*): Champagne! Champagne!

CURTAIN



Nicholas Nicholaievitch Evreinov

# THE CORRIDORS OF THE SOUL

*A Monodrama*

ADAPTED BY PERCIVAL WILDE  
FROM THE VIENNA VERSION  
OF FRANZ THEODOR CSOKOR



## CHARACTERS

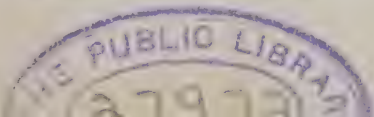
THE PROFESSOR (as Prologue)  
THE CLINICAL ASSISTANT (mute)  
THE FIRST SELF (Reason)  
THE SECOND SELF (Emotion)  
THE THIRD SELF (the Immortal Subconscious)  
THE WIFE (in two semblances)  
THE INAMORATA (in two semblances)  
A CONDUCTOR

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THE CLINICAL ASSISTANT in a white uniform enters at the right in front of the curtain, with a blackboard, coloured chalks and a sponge.

THE PROFESSOR (*entering at the left, taking his position next to the blackboard, and addressing the audience*): Ladies and gentlemen, last Friday the author of the play, *The Corridors of the Soul*, which is about to be performed for you, sought me out in connection with this work. I confess that once the manuscript had been delivered to me I began its perusal with distrust, for I expected it to be just another theatrically illogical light comedy. I was all the more pleasantly surprised, therefore, when I discovered, as I can testify to you, that *The Corridors of the Soul* was a most scientific work, in complete harmony with the latest hypotheses of empirical psycho-analysis. The investigations of Freud, Wundt, Théodule Ribot, and others have led us to conclude that the human soul is not homogeneous, is not a unity, but is composed of a number of selves. Do you follow me? (*He writes*)  $S_1 + S_2 + S_3 + S_4 . . . + S^* = S$ . Fichte, indeed, advanced the kindred view that even if one self was the self, the external world could be no self. Now recent scientific research discloses that precisely as the world is no self, so the self itself is not a single self. Do you follow me? The self, as I have already explained, is not a simple entity, because multiple selves are to be found in the one. As a matter of fact, existence is more than a plain "I am," for the complete self, our so-called soul, is, according to the latest opinion, a triple ego. (*He writes on the board*)  $Ego = X : 3$ . If X represents the individual, then (*he writes*)  $X = 3$  Ego. Now the first self is the logical one, our reason; the second self is the illogical one, our emotions. Both terminate with this life. The third, subconscious self, which is to be found on the other side of the threshold, is the undying part of our souls: psychic energy. The three smaller selves total up to the capital Self,

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and we write in simpler form the equation with which we began (*he writes*):  $S_1 + S_2 + S_3 = S$ .

Where shall we say the individual parts of the collective self reside in us? What is the site of the so-called soul? The ancients placed it in the liver; Descartes placed it in the pineal gland; our author, however, believes that the soul is to be found at the spot to which we instinctively raise our hands whenever we utter strong expressions, such as "How terrible!" or "Oh, my soul!" or other phrases indicating horror. Do you follow me?

Perhaps I may sum up most clearly by presenting graphically the corridors of the soul. (*He draws on the board with coloured chalks.*) At the left, above the high-vaulted diaphragm, suspended by the aorta and the veins, hangs a great heart, which beats sixty to one hundred and twenty-five times a minute. The lobes of the lungs function on either side of it, breathing fourteen to sixteen times a minute. The spine rises vertically in the background, with the ribs radiating out from it. There is communication with the brain; I represent it by a telephonic apparatus sketched in yellow, the colour of the nerves. Slanting obliquely towards the diaphragm, like the strings of a harp, I draw the pale nerves themselves. That, approximately, ladies and gentlemen, is the stage setting in which we place the tripartite soul of the tall, bad-tempered individual with whom we are now about to deal, a certain Mr. Ivanov, who is at the moment in a dance-hall, or in some other similar place wholly unsuitable for a respectable gentlemen, and who is drinking most intemperately. Do you follow me?

Knowledge, ladies and gentlemen, does not merely explain: it consoles. Knowledge, for example, does not merely assert that the total self is unhappy because of the silly act of one of its components; it proceeds to discover which self is to blame. If it be the emotional self, then the matter is of little importance so long as the rational self still functions; in a similar manner the subconscious, slumbering within us, can do no harm so long as it remains on the other side of the threshold of consciousness. The situation becomes dangerous only when it is the fault of the rational self, either because of its illness or because its will is thwarted; and that, ladies and gentlemen, is very apt to occur in the

strenuous times in which we live. But now I wish to terminate my introduction. You understand the situation, and I make way for it—way for the author, way for the actors, and, most of all, way for you, the appreciative audience gathered together to witness this remarkable play. Do you follow me ?

[*He goes.* THE ASSISTANT *takes up the blackboard and its appurtenances and follows him.*

#### THE CURTAIN RISES

*The scene shows the site of the soul, exactly as explained and diagrammed on the blackboard by the PROFESSOR. On the floor of the stage (the red, somewhat convex diaphragm) are the three selves, all dressed in black, all somewhat similar, but each dressed in a different manner. THE FIRST SELF, reason, wears a faultless walking coat and striped trousers; THE SECOND, emotion, is in Bohemian costume, with a velvet jacket and a flowing purple bow tie; THE THIRD, the immortal self, is garbed in travelling clothes, a cap on the head, with the peak half pulled down over the face. THE FIRST SELF is somewhat grey at the temples, and the hair is carefully parted. THE SECOND SELF has a tousled head, and seems to be young and irresponsible. His lips are very red; his gestures are violent. THE THIRD SELF lies at the L., resting his head on a packed valise, and sleeps like an exhausted traveller during the action which follows.*

*The lungs and heart function in whatever manner may be worked out by the stage direction.*

THE SECOND SELF (*at the spine, talking into the telephone*): What? . . . Hello! . . . Don't you hear me? . . . Well, I'm talking loudly enough! . . . Oh, your ears are ringing? That's nothing but the trickery of your nerves; drown them out! Brandy! More brandy, that's what you need!

[*The heart begins to beat more rapidly.*

THE FIRST SELF (*disapprovingly*): That's the third bottle! And all on account of you, as if you were the only person



here ! Look at that heart overworking ! Don't you see how it's thumping ?

THE SECOND SELF (*nervously*) : Of course I see ; but, according to you it should spend its whole life loafing—like that object there ! (*He indicates* THE THIRD SELF.) A hell of an existence *he* leads !

THE FIRST SELF : Shh ! Leave him alone ! I merely call to your attention that if you continue to strain the heart in this manner it will quit completely.

THE SECOND SELF : What of it ? That's what's going to happen, anyhow, sooner or later.

THE FIRST SELF : Then you agree with my diagnosis ?

THE SECOND SELF (*undisturbed*) : Why not ? Sometimes you're right.

*[He twangs on the nerves, which respond with jangling noises. He sings like a child, insolently :*

Sometimes ! . . . Sometimes ! . . .

THE FIRST SELF : Don't pluck at the nerves so violently ! How often have I forbidden you to do that ?

THE SECOND SELF (*taking offence*) : Forbidden ? Forbidden ? Whom do you think you are talking to ? Do you take me for your lackey ? Hah ! I'm a poet ! I am love ! Flame ! Revolution ! If it weren't for me this place would be a sepulchre full of mould and spider-webs ! Yes, a sepulchre !

THE FIRST SELF (*controlled*) : Stop talking nonsense.

THE SECOND SELF : I'm telling you the truth. (*He pauses.*) Now, that matter of his drinking : whose fault is it ?

THE FIRST SELF : Yours ! You compel him to do it !

THE SECOND SELF : All right ; but I make him do it because he'd hang himself if he had to listen to your long-winded dissertations all day long.

THE FIRST SELF : How ridiculous ! It's quite the other way round ; all his unhappiness and lack of success are your fault ! Yes, yours ! You, Mr. Emotional Self, are nothing but a disorderly person, an abandoned wretch, beyond salvation ! Has it ever struck you that there are such things as ethical standards, human duties, religion ?



THE SECOND SELF: You're a walking tract. Don't annoy me.

THE FIRST SELF: You can't insult me, no matter what you say. My opinion of you is too low.

THE SECOND SELF: And mine of you is still lower. *I'm an artist !*

*[He grasps the nerves and twangs them violently.]*

THE FIRST SELF: How absurd you are ! And stop wrenching on my nerves !

THE SECOND SELF: *Your nerves ! That's rich !* Mr. Rational Self, let me point out to you that these nerves belong to us both, and that if I wrench at your nerves I wrench at my own at the same time. I have exactly as much right to do it as you. If I treated our nerves in the manner *you* approve I'd be bored sick ! Not for me, thank you ! I want to raise bob with my nerves, and I'm going to do it ! I enjoy it, because they're as taut as the strings of a harp ! I can play a hymn on them, a hymn to freedom and to love !

*[He plays ; the heart labours prodigiously. He stops and runs to the telephone :*

THE FIRST SELF (*following him quickly and taking the apparatus from him*) : Bromide, please !

THE SECOND SELF (*struggling with him*) : Brandy—what the devil !

THE FIRST SELF (*forcing him away from the telephone, and keeping him away*) : Take a bromide, my dear sir ! Do you hear me ? . . . What ? . . . They're in your waistcoat pocket. . . . No ? Look again. . . . Ah ! You found them in your glasses-case ? How lucky ! . . . And now drink a glass of water. That's right. . . . At last !

*[He hangs up and returns to the centre more quietly. The dialogue which follows has a more subdued character on account of the bromide. The heart functions normally, and THE THIRD SELF seems to sleep more soundly.]*

*For a little while THE FIRST AND SECOND SELVES walk up and down silently, staring at the floor. Presently they come face to face.*

THE FIRST SELF: Are you quieter now ?

THE SECOND SELF (*friendly*) : Hum. . . . And you ?

THE FIRST SELF: You see for yourself.

[*They have approached THE THIRD SELF.*

THE SECOND SELF (*shaking his head*): What on earth is the matter with that chap, the subconscious?

THE FIRST SELF (*respectfully*): He's always the same. He rests in sublime peace. (*As THE SECOND SELF bends towards him*) In Heaven's name, don't touch him! Come here, instead, and listen. This concerns you as well as me.

[*He goes to the telephone.*

The bromide had a good effect, didn't it? . . . Fine! Now I'm going to make another attempt to influence your conscience. My dear sir, I really don't understand why you should be so very much upset. I can see now the woman bewitched you with her talents—if we may call her peculiar qualities "talents"—but that you should consider leaving your wife and children on her account—— (*To THE SECOND SELF, who attempts to take the apparatus, rather sharply*) Excuse me, please! (*Into the telephone*) My dear sir, there's simply no excuse for that kind of thing. It isn't just done. It's only when you lower yourself into the gutter that nice legs and a slim neck count for more than the temple of the soul.

THE SECOND SELF: My God, what trite and affected rubbish! "The temple of the soul!" The devil take your "temple"! I want flesh and blood, and that's why she appeals to me! She is desirable for her body. Who would deny that?

THE FIRST SELF (*contemptuously*): An animal wouldn't, no, but a rational human being would! (*Into the telephone*) Smoke a cigar—a light cigar. It will soothe you. And in future do what I tell you. Right?

THE SECOND SELF: And I'm chained to that sort of thing to the end of my days!

THE FIRST SELF: There was a time when you didn't object.

THE SECOND SELF: Quite right! There was even a time when I had a good deal of respect for you—when you were amenable to reason, Mr. Rational Self. Naturally I shan't forget how helpful you were when I fell head over heels in

love with that little Hanni, how you overcame the girl's caution with your pious prating, how very skilfully you deceived her parents ! Yes, indeed, you can be a sanctimonious blackguard when you want to ! But at heart you're a Philistine, nevertheless ! Ever since I married you've given me no help whatever. You've neglected the most tempting opportunities.

THE FIRST SELF: You compliment me—in spite of our conflicting views. But I don't take you seriously; your talk is that of a sick man.

THE SECOND SELF: Good heavens ! What do you know about it, Rational Self ? You don't understand what a noble creature she is ! How perfectly adorable ! How charming ! How divine ! How childish and devilish at the same time in her sweet coquetry ! I'll grant you that she is nothing but a chorus girl, but what's it against her ? What does it signify ? You haven't seen her in her full beauty, or even you would have yielded to her charms. But no, no ! Why should I resort to mere words, when I can show you the reality. I'll fetch her !

[*He runs out at the L. and returns with THE INAMORATA in the semblance in which his infatuation pictures her.*]

Sing for me, divine creature. Sing as you did yesterday, as once, as always ! Sing ! *Chantez ! Je vous prie !* (To THE RATIONAL SELF, *which stares at the semblance with growing horror*) *A propos*, old chap, you ought to learn French. Don't you think so ? I tell you that French is just as necessary as a bite of bread.

[*THE INAMORATA sings and dances in time with the happily beating heart.*]

THE FIRST SELF (*turning his back*) : I'll have nothing to do with this.

THE SECOND SELF (*when she finishes, delighted*) : Charming ! I'd give the world for your voice ! What, for your voice ? For your dainty feet ! By God, there isn't a carpet in existence that's good enough for your twinkling toes !

[*He throws himself on the floor before her.*]

See ! I adore you ! I worship you ! Dance on me ! Oh, you divine creature, you angelic dream !

*[He kisses her feet, her hands, her mouth, her hair.]*

THE FIRST SELF: What an illusion of the senses ! Stop ! You're not kissing what you think you are ; you're kissing the externalization of your dreams ! Don't you smell the rouge ? Can't you see that the hair which your fingers are caressing, the hair which you think is hers, is nothing but a wig ? She's forty if she's a day ! Don't let her make a fool of you ! Look at the actual facts !

*[While he speaks the idealized semblance of THE INAMORATA disappears at the R., and he leads in a caricature of her at the L.]*

There ! Look ! The twinkling toes are crippled ! They've got ingrown nails and bunions, and she's wearing imitation calves ! Look at her face ! Off with the rouge and off with the wig !

*[He rubs his hand over her face, getting it red in the process, and rips off the wig, under which are only a few strands of hair.]*

Show me what you've got in your mouth !

*[He draws out a set of false teeth.]*

There ! And now, sing ! Sing and dance, my little darling !

*[THE INAMORATA sings discordantly and dances clumsily.]*

THE SECOND SELF (*screaming*) : Lies ! Lies ! She's nothing like that ! You've bewitched her ! (*To the semblance*) Out with you !

*[He throws her out and falls to his knees.]*

I'm going insane !

THE FIRST SELF: What is the French proverb ? " Jupiter, you are angry. Therefore you are wrong."

THE SECOND SELF (*leaping up*) : Rot !

THE FIRST SELF: Not at all, Mr. Emotional Self. You are aware that your noble, adored creature, isn't fit to tie up the shoelaces of the woman from whom you're so anxious to free yourself. And why ? I ask you, why ?

*[From the L. he leads in a Madonna-like semblance of THE WIFE, with a child cradled in her arms.]*

Because this woman has offered you only tenderness and affection, because she nursed your child at her warm breast,



because she watches over its cradle. No, you can't compare her singing with the frivolous songs of the other one.

[THE WIFE *begins to sing Mozart's "Cradle Song," "Sleep, my angel, sleep . . ."*]

Just listen, Mr. Emotional Self ! Listen to the lullaby ! Have you no appreciation of those limpid notes ? I'll grant you she doesn't indulge in pyrotechnics, and that there's nothing theatrically effective in her delivery. Her voice is poor and thin ; it's the third night that she's gone without sleep, singing, singing, while waiting for you !

THE WIFE (*who has finished the song, pauses ; sighs*) : Yes, sleep, little angel. What ? You've got a pain somewhere ? It'll be gone soon, sweet. Just be brave and patient, darling . . . Daddy ? Where is Daddy ? He'll be home soon. . . . He's coming straight away, dear ! Straight away ! Yes ! And maybe he'll bring you a new toy to play with ; a little horse that goes trot, trot. Oh, Daddy is always so kind.

THE SECOND SELF (*coarsely*) : Enough of that nonsense ! There's not a word of truth in it ! Away with you !

[*He thrusts her out.*]

*She* a devoted wife ? *She* ? It's a figment of your imagination ! I know her better than that ! She's killed my energy with her eternal stupidity ! She's never given me a single moment of joy !

[*From the R. he brings in THE WIFE as he sees her, an arrogant, provincial woman, with false, dangling ringlets, and a sloppy negligée, spotted with coffee-stains.*]

THE CARICATURE OF THE WIFE (*nagging*) : To be the wife of a minor Government official ? That's a fine job ! And to be the wife of a fool like you ? God, my poor parents ! If they only knew they'd turn over in their graves ! I could have married a big pot, and see what I've got stuck with ! (*Turning*) How on earth has he been able to hold on to his job this long ? Why haven't they kicked him out, the drunkard ? He soaks the little brain he's got in alcohol, the swine ! That's what he is : nothing but a swine ! Yes, he knows how to bring children into the world—and how to run after every dirty little tart—and he has the impudence to prate of his love for art, to say that he cares for the



theatre ! The slob ! As if night clubs and houses of prostitution were theatres ! If I were a man I'd stay miles away from the painted carrion he finds there ! How can I know he won't pass on some filthy disease to the children, the rotten cad ? But how could he be anything else than that ? He's not accountable for his actions. If I didn't keep my eyes open he'd take the children's blankets to the pawn-broker's ! You bet he would ! A man who hardly knows what even the outside of a church looks like ! And who is as stupid as an inbecile into the bargain ! But he *talks* philosophically ! If he hasn't got "freedom" and "ordinary human rights" he can't even go to sleep ! He talks about those things until he's hoarse—naturally in pubs, while lapping up liquor. Well, I'll knock those ideas of "freedom" out of his hide for him !

THE SECOND SELF (*triumphantly*): *That's what she's like !* (To THE CARICATURE) You heroine ! (To THE FIRST SELF) Why shouldn't I leave her, and go to the other woman ?

[*From the left he leads in the idealized semblance of THE INAMORATA.*

Why shouldn't I go to this woman, who is to her as the sun is to a tallow candle, who can bring sense and purpose into my life ?

[THE INAMORATA *sings, and introducing kicks into her dancing, kicks out THE CARICATURE OF THE WIFE; suddenly she stops, as the idealized semblance of THE WIFE re-enters.*

THE WIFE (to THE INAMORATA): Please go. You don't belong here.

THE FIRST SELF: Quite right.

THE WIFE: You don't really love him. You wouldn't make the slightest sacrifice for him. To you he is just one man among men; to me he is everything. If there's a spark of womanly decency left in you, let him go ! I need him and his help. Don't take him away from his family: it will suffer without him.

THE INAMORATA (*laughing merrily*): Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! (*With an outlandish accent, and sneering speech.*) What pathos ! What cheap theatricalism !

THE WIFE: I ask you again, please go. Don't force me to extreme measures.

THE INAMORATA: So you dare to threaten me? Well, that's good! What am *I* going to do about it if my feet are so dainty, my breasts so firm, my voice so effortless that it floats out of my throat like that of a lark, my wit so natural that it sparkles like champagne?

THE SECOND SELF (*applauding*): Bravo! Bravo!

THE WIFE: All you want is his money, you cheap bought woman!

THE INAMORATA: What? I'm cheap, and I'm bought? Take it back?

*[She throws herself upon her.]*

THE WIFE: Get out!

*[They seize each other and struggle, while the heart beats rapidly, as if in a deadly palpitation. They fight their way into the background, in which they vanish, while a great shudder convulses the entire organism—and in the movement brings back the battling women, each now in her caricatured semblance. THE WIFE brandishes the teeth and the wig of THE CHORUS GIRL (INAMORATA), who, in turn, triumphantly exhibits the false curls and braid of her enemy. The women are screaming atrocious words at each other.]*

THE WIFE: You dirty slut!

THE INAMORATA: Washerwoman! Stupid cow!

*[They disappear again into the background and return in their idealized semblances. THE INAMORATA forces THE WIFE to the ground, and sets her foot on her neck. Then she turns laughingly with a graceful dance step and a "Voilà!" to the side at which THE EMOTIONAL SELF applauds loudly, while THE WIFE, weeping, steals away at the L.]*

THE FIRST SELF, who has controlled himself with difficulty during this scene, now flings himself upon THE INAMORATA and strikes her across the face. THE INAMORATA screams and flees, wailing to the rear, where she hides. THE SECOND SELF leaps at THE FIRST SELF with a tigerish spring and strangles him.

*The heart throbs frantically, missing beats. Two or three nerves snap. THE INAMORATA returns slowly.*

THE SECOND SELF (*makes sure that his foe is dead; then throws himself at the feet of THE INAMORATA*): Now everything is going to be as you want it ! Dearest ! Darling ! Sweetheart !

THE INAMORATA (*primping with the aid of a compact*): That's enough, dearie. I'm fed up. I'm through. Love sings in notes—banknotes ! You don't seem to have many of them, do you, dearie ? What ? No, a fellow like you wouldn't have coin. Of course not. . . . Don't look at me like that ; there's nothing to be done about it. It was good fun while it lasted, but it's over now. See ? Don't be so tragic about it ! So long !

*[She pats his cheek and trips off to the R.]*

THE SECOND SELF *stands as if petrified. A long, clear trill—the voice of THE INAMORATA—becomes louder and louder at the R. ; at the L., from the darkness, gradually appears the idealized semblance of THE WIFE, seeming to quiet the child in her arms. She lifts her head, and gazes at him with great, dark eyes, full of silent reproach. The motif of " The Cradle Song " begins, and disappears slowly with the vision.*

THE SECOND SELF *breaks out suddenly in absolute despair. He runs to the telephone. He snatches the receiver to his ear.*

THE SECOND SELF (*forcefully*): Just one request ! Quick ! End it ! I can't stand any more ! I'm through ! . . . The pistol is in your hip pocket ! Yes ! Point it at yourself—quickly ! Please ! Quickly ! I feel so awful ! . . . (*Urgently*) Aim carefully—between the third and fourth ribs ! . . . Yes ! Well ? Well ? What are you afraid of ? It'll take only a fraction of a second ! . . . Be merciful ! (*Screaming*) Now !

*[There is a second's pause. THE THIRD SELF is awake, and is glancing about uneasily, the prey to a vague suspicion.]*

*Then there is the crash of a shot, deafening as the report of a cannon. Its thunder echoes in the vault of the organs. A huge circular hole suddenly appears in the heart, and red streams of blood—broad serpentine ribbons—pour down upon THE SECOND SELF, who collapses, suffocating, dying, under the torrent.*

*The stage darkens. The heart has stopped beating. The lungs cease to breathe.*

*There is a long pause, during which THE THIRD SELF stretches, yawns, and rubs his eyes,*

A CONDUCTOR (*entering quickly with a lighted lantern*): You, sir ! Get up, sir ! You've got to change here. Yes, change ! You're going into another Mr. Ivanov.

THE THIRD SELF (*rising*): Another Mr. Ivanov ? . . . Again ? . . . Well, let's try the new Ivanov. So far as I'm concerned, they're all alike.

[*He settles his travelling cap firmly, takes up his valise, and yawningly follows* THE CONDUCTOR *off*.

THE CURTAIN FALLS





Aino Kallas



BATH-SHEBA OF SAAREMAA

*A Play*

TRANSLATED FROM THE FINNISH  
BY ALEX MATSON

## CHARACTERS

KUIGU-SIIM – blacksmith at Vaida Manor  
RIINA – his wife  
VANA-KAI – his mother

THE SCENE is laid in the parish of JÄMAJA on the SAAREMAA ISLAND, off the Estonian Coast. Time: 1850.

A log-cabin—dwelling-house and barn combined—with drying-rafters under the roof and an earthen floor. On the right, an open hearth with a fire burning under a black cauldron swung from a hook. Before the fire, a smoke-blackened hearthstone, and a three-legged stand with an iron socket, in which a short slat is burning. On the left, a small square window, patched with birch bark; under the window a hand loom and spinning wheel. A piece of striped cloth, half-woven, is stretched on the loom. In one corner a wooden bed with sheepskin rugs. The door has a small sliding shutter, sole outlet for the smoke.

An evening in January. A snowstorm is raging outside.

VANA-KAI (an old woman, small and bent. She wears a short coat lined with sheepskin above a red-striped, pleated skirt. Her eyes are watery with smoke. Climbing down painfully from the top of the big oven, she takes up a pair of tongs, picks glowing cinders from the hearth, one by one, and drops them singly into a tub of water): One—two—three—four—five—, not one has sunk to the bottom yet,—six—seven . . . Eight ! Nine ! They're floating, all of them !

RIINA (enters with two buckets slung from her shoulders, and her skirts tucked up high. She wears the costume of the women of Jämaja, a long pleated skirt reaching above the waist, the upper half black and the lower part striped horizontally with broad red and narrow white stripes; a short red vest, white sleeves. On her head a knitted cap of red and black, ending in a dangling tassel. Her feet are clad in red stockings and sandals. A young woman, high-bosomed, slender; eyes of a dark blue, steel blue sometimes when they flash; yellow hair, like the Swedish women on the Islands. She shakes the snow from her feet and clothes and takes off her sheepskin coat): What are you doing, Granny ?

VANA-KAI: Dropping red coal into the water to try Siim's luck. Nine bits o' coal, and every one a-floating.

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Application for permission to perform this play must be made to Messrs. A. P. Watt & Son, Hastings House, Norfolk Street, Strand, London, W.C.2.

RIINA (*sits down on the hearthstone, pulls off her sandals and stockings and warms her bare feet at the fire*): What does that mean for Siim?

VANA-KAI: Good luck, of course. But if the coal sinks it's ruin.

[RIINA *puts on dry stockings, and, rising, accidentally gives the tub a jolt.*

VANA-KAI (*lamenting*): Look what you've done! Shaken the water! And now my bits o' coal have gone to the bottom—every one!

RIINA: A silly game. It means nothing at all.

VANA-KAI: The coal knows! Have you been to the well?

RIINA: I milked the cows and took them their feed. I went to the well too.

VANA-KAI: I suppose it's snowing outside?

RIINA: The whole yard's snowed up. I had to wade through drifts up to my knees, with my skirts all in the snow.

VANA-KAI: Then there'll be drifts along the high road too. It was in a blizzard like this that Siim's father—God rest his soul!—wandered from the road and perished in the snow, coming home from the tavern with the brandy in him, and I was left alone. Ay, we all know what life's like to a bird with one wing.—You didn't happen to go as far as the cross-roads?

RIINA (*impatiently, as she rinses a bucket beside the hearth*): What would I have been doing there?

VANA-KAI: Don't fly straight at my eyes! A question doesn't call for a blow on the mouth. I'm the house-dog, not a village cur. (*Rising gradually to her feet, and groaning*) Blessed Lord, these knees! The older you get the fresher your pains. Though they do say that if you step over a grave in the churchyard your leg will get well. Who knows? I haven't tried. Oh, if the Lord in His mercy would take me away to a new cabin. I'm as set on my last hour as on the Heavenly Bridegroom. But there, Death's already closer to me than the shift on my back, and even then my days

stretch out as though there was a rope tied to them. It's for Siim's sake that the breath still stirs in my breast.

[*Staggers slowly towards the door.*]

RIINA: Bless us, where are you off to now, Granny?

VANA-KAI: I couldn't stay still any longer, on the ground or in a tree. I'm going to the high road to look.

RIINA: Don't do that; you'll fall on your face in a drift, an old body like you. It's dark, too.

VANA-KAI: Let me go. There's nothing else to do. The flesh won't hold to my bones when I think of Siim. The Lord knows best why He has prepared this supper of sorrow for me to eat.

RIINA (*abruptly*): It's no use going, Granny, there's no sign of Siim yet.

VANA-KAI: How can you be so sure of that?

RIINA: Because I've just been to the high road to look.

VANA-KAI: Huh, catch a word by its tail. Surely that truth didn't cost you an eye-tooth. (*Sits down on the hearthstone in the glow of the firelight.*) Take the advice of an old woman, don't pick at an old heart. But you can hide, hide yourself in an iron nutshell, and God will see you still.

RIINA: Did you say anything?

VANA-KAI: I was only mumbling to myself.

RIINA (*busying herself about the room*): Granny, say what do you think makes Siim so late? Is it a good sign or a bad one?

VANA-KAI: The Lord God knows best. Perhaps they'll let Siim off; perhaps he won't be passed to go for a soldier.

RIINA (*slowly*): Do you believe that, Granny?

VANA-KAI: Do I know the Baron's business, an old woman with one foot in the grave and the other on the brink? We've seen, ay, we've seen things, but there's still some we haven't seen. If he only had some blemish on his body, but no, he's sound and ruddy, you could draw blood from him with a straw. Tough as wolf's-flesh. But he's got the



Baron's letter with him. If the Barons don't want a thing to happen, it won't. They'll take no one for a soldier against the Baron's will.

RIINA (*with her back to VANA-KAI*): Yes, that's true—he's got the Baron's letter.

[*Silence.*]

VANA-KAI: Of course, if he's made the Barons hate him, that's another story. Though they do say you can escape that by saying the Lord's prayer three times in one breath. (*With apparent carelessness*) I suppose you were at the manor again to-day, were you?

RIINA: Yes, I was there.

VANA-KAI: Taking your turn in the cow-house, I suppose?

RIINA: Yes, in the cow-house.

VANA-KAI: How long have you been taking your turn with the cows? You weren't called on before.

RIINA: Why, I've been there every day since St. Nicholas, only you've forgotten, Granny. The Manor people called on us for our turn.

VANA-KAI: Who troubles to remind me of anything? Best to be deaf and blind. I've drunk more eye-water in my days than I've eaten bread.—And don't you start putting on airs, as if your nose were gilded. I'm not quite blind yet, though I do squat on the bake-oven.—Them they take to the Manor fall in the fire.

RIINA: What are you talking about?

VANA-KAI: I'm only saying that, when it's dark, a cat's eyes can see. (*Silence. She begins humming a hymn-tune softly to herself.*)

Dear Lord,—

From the Harsh Chastisement,  
From the Cruel Dread of War,  
From the Fire, Pestilence and Famine,  
From the Sin that threatens us,  
And from Spiritual Death,  
Save us dear Lord.

(*Rocking herself backward and forward*) Oh Lord, oh Lord, what else hast Thou in store for us before the evening of this day?

RIINA: Won't you have anything to eat, Granny?

VANA-KAI: Sleep won't come to my eye, nor a scrap go down my throat.

RIINA: Come, Granny, I've taken hot potatoes from the pot, and there's both bite and sup on the table.

VANA-KAI: Soon I shall have done with eating and drunk my last drop. There'll be no end to my troubles until my two hands are crossed on my breast. My tears have run dry, but a hot lump still rises in my throat. Something's always gnawing under my heart, running like ants to my fingertips. My only son, nah! The very print of his foot is dearer to me than any other living soul.

RIINA: Granny, say, if Siim is taken for a soldier, where will they send him?

VANA-KAI: To Russia, it's always to Russia. Some they send to the cold country, right to Siberia.

RIINA: And will they really keep him twenty-five years?

VANA-KAI: Five-and-twenty, ay, no less. The Tsar won't be satisfied with less, that's his measure. There's seven winds at the heels of him they send out there.

RIINA: God bless us—why, he'll be an old man!

VANA-KAI: What? That cauldron bubbles so I can't hear.

RIINA: He'll be well on in years when he gets back, I said.

VANA-KAI: Old, of course, and even if not too far gone in years, he'll be like a tree with the sap run dry. Death reaps them like dry twigs.

RIINA: Don't they let them come home at all in between?

VANA-KAI: There's no saying. What's in the wolf's jaws stays there, and no power or might can drag it away. And for farmwork they're never any good any more; a sword won't make a ploughshare, even if there is the same iron in them. The Crown's leavings! Their fingers won't bend to

the scythe any more after holding a gun for five-and-twenty years. Loafing in taverns is about all they're good for.

RIINA: Five-and-twenty years !

VANA-KAI: They say they forget their own language and begin to jabber Russian. Some, I've heard, forget how to speak at all. No wonder the young men hide in the bogs when their turn comes to be passed for soldiering. They fear it as a maggot does a woodpecker. But where's a man to run to from an Island, sea before and sea behind ?

RIINA: What'll become of me, then ? A live man's widow. A husband and no husband.

VANA-KAI: You ? There'll always be a place for you. You can go back to the Manor as housemaid. A birch will never grow from a spruce-stump. That's where you came from, and it's still in your blood. These earth floors are not for the hem of your skirt.

RIINA: Say what you like, there's always claws and teeth in your words. As though I haven't been up these three dawns before the crows.

VANA-KAI: My claws and teeth won't harm anyone. Ah, well, bow down to a hen and it'll fly on to your neck. Have you thought of me at all, worn with age as I am ? If Siim is taken for a soldier, it'll be the last I see of him with these mortal eyes. Earth is all I'll be when Siim comes back. It's different with you ; you can start your flirting again at the Manor.

RIINA: O God, the Father, what a life. But go on ; peck the heart out of my breast if you like. You'll find nothing wrong there.

VANA-KAI: It's always the mother-bee that stings the worst. Haven't I followed children enough to the grave, laying them there as in a storehouse, putting them to wait until I can slip in myself ! It's another thing when the last and only one is taken—like dying a hundred deaths, every God's day over again.

RIINA: How can I help that ? You talk as though it depended on me.

VANA-KAI: If only you had a child, you'd look after that. Perhaps they wouldn't have wanted Siim then for a soldier. It's rare for the Tsar to ask for a family man. But no. Married over a year, and slim as a hop pole.

RIINA: There isn't a hair left on my head that you haven't found fault with. I never hear my right name now in this house. Sing high, sing low, it's always the same. What is it you want of me, Granny? Tell me straight out that I may know.

VANA-KAI: Don't call so that the soot falls off the ceiling. Talk won't bite a piece out of you. A tale asks for a tale, and a word for a word. What use is a childless woman, like a fallow field? I tell you, though, that the pitcher goes to the well until it is broken.

RIINA: What do you mean by that?

VANA-KAI: Only that sin binds us at first with a hair, then with a rope.

RIINA (*flushed with passion*): I shan't die yet of your threats. Old as earth, but still slanderous as a serpent. It's always the daughter-in-law has nine faults, the mother-in-law not one. You live on the oven-top like a bat under a roof and think you see and hear everything.

VANA-KAI: No one knows all a blind beggar can touch with his stick.

RIINA: And what if I were after all that way?

VANA-KAI: What, not alone? Are there two of you?

[*A loud gust of wind. The sound of horses' hoofs is heard and the scraping of sleigh-runners.*]

RIINA (*pale with fright*): God the Father, help!

VANA-KAI (*rising and listening*): What made you shriek like that? You made my heart jump into my mouth.

RIINA (*trembling all over*): Wasn't it the sound of a sleigh? If Siim should come now . . .

VANA-KAI (*listening*): It drove past, took the turning by the church. Don't get into such a state, God's creature. As though you had nettles in your shift. What was it you were saying just now? Are you carrying Siim's child?

RIINA: I was only teasing. I'm quite alone.

VANA-KAI: Take a drink of water—look how you're shaking. There you are—the heart fluttering in you like a lamb's tail.

RIINA: If it's him—if they've taken him after all for a soldier !

VANA-KAI: Will you be quiet—there's no one coming yet. I'd never have believed you'd get into such a state for Siim's sake. After all (*with slow emphasis*), Siim has the Baron's letter with him.

RIINA (*suddenly as though turned to stone coldly*): You, too, believe in that letter as though God Himself had written it.

VANA-KAI: Don't you believe in it ?

[RIINA *makes no reply*.

VANA-KAI: A letter does not lie. I saw it in Siim's hand this morning with my own eyes. A big one it was, written in the Baron's own hand. Four red eagles at the corners and one in the middle. You brought it yourself from the Manor.

[RIINA *does not answer*.

VANA-KAI: How was it really with that letter, Riina ? You went to the Baron yesterday to ask that Siim should not be taken. Was that it ?

RIINA (*fretfully*): I told you everything when I came back many times over.

VANA-KAI: I hear so badly that half of what's said is swallowed up on the way and only scraps reach my ear. You saw the Baron himself, then ?

RIINA: I did.

VANA-KAI (*cautiously feeling her way*): Was he alone in the room ?

RIINA: I believe he was—or, I don't remember exactly—wait a moment, perhaps his gracious lady was there too.

VANA-KAI: What was his lady doing there ?

RIINA: What do ladies do ? Sit with their arms crossed.



VANA-KAI: Lying so, that the foam comes out of her mouth. Don't start wriggling—the gracious lady wasn't in the room.

RIINA: Why do you ask me, if you know better?

VANA-KAI: I know what I know. But now I want to hear it out of your own mouth. The Baron promised to write a letter to the army gentlemen in the town, did he? That they weren't to take Kuigu-Siim, a widow's only son? That he has an old mother with six woes, and death a seventh? That there are other men of his, idle fellows—let them go—they can well be spared for five-and-twenty years. They all look alike in the Crown's shoddy, like as sprats—lay 'em in rows in a barrel. Did he promise to put all that in the letter?

RIINA: I suppose he wrote it all.

VANA-KAI: Why only "suppose"? Don't you know? She has a heart as hard as the bottom of a barrel. You yourself went to ask him. You stood beside him while he wrote.

RIINA: Have *I* read the letter?

VANA-KAI: Even if you didn't read it, you were there. Did you even ask him to? Did you pray for your man as for the everlasting bliss of your soul? Did you hug the Baron's knees? Answer!

RIINA: Ask what you like, I'll breathe neither black nor white. What makes you watch me like a crow a horse's mouth? Though I were to melt into blue water, I'm innocent.

VANA-KAI: There's no call for you to get so mad, as though you were spitting live coals. You'll eat the eyes out of my head next. I haven't skinned the hide off anybody's ribs. Do you want to know what Siim has, shall I tell you? Siim has a young wife who flaunts herself before the Lords of the Manor.

RIINA: Granny—I—I . . .

VANA-KAI: In that letter which the Baron wrote, there was something *else*. Do you understand, something *else*.

RIINA (*horror-stricken*): What—do you know then?

VANA-KAI: And you know it, too. Do you pretend not to know? Well, answer—why don't you answer? A while ago you were in such good voice that a sleigh and a cart would have gone down your throat. Ay, a body can know more than what's shouted down her ear.

[RIINA makes no answer.]

VANA-KAI (*rises up, leaning on her stick, and stands face to face with RIINA, stressing every word*): Shall I tell you? In that letter it said "Take Kuigu-Siim for a soldier." Wasn't it so?

[*The neighing of a horse is heard outside, and at the same time a loud crash, followed by coarse oaths.*]

RIINA: He's come!

VANA-KAI: Ay, he's come! He's come! What made him drive at a gallop like that? I do believe he broke his shaft on the gate-post.

RIINA: I'll go and help in the stable.

VANA-KAI (*banging her stick against the cauldron*): Stay where you are! Don't move a step, I say!

[*Both stand still as though petrified with suspense.*]

KUIGU-SIIM (*flings the door open. He is covered with snow. He wears a fur-cap with the flaps turned down, top-boots, and a short sheepskin-lined coat, so that the metal disc on his lapel, marked with the number Twelve, is hidden. Dark-skinned, a straight nose, shaven cheeks, a short moustache, deep-set eyes. He is in the earlier stages of intoxication*): Greetings to this house! God give long life and high honour. What, does no one answer? Mother, hey! Riina!

VANA-KAI (*feeling his coat with shaking fingers*): No number—God the Father be praised to all eternity! They didn't take you after all then, Siim. God be with the giver. What was that crash outside?

KUIGU-SIIM: The shaft went.

VANA-KAI: What's a shaft! God be praised. I laid nine bits o' coal on the water to try your luck, and they all

floated. And this is what they foretold. But you're wet through with snow, not a dry spot even in the corner of his teeth.

KUIGU-SIIM: Enough, enough, mother. Riina, come here. What are you hiding for behind the loom? Come out. Let me look at you, like a honeycomb at the sun. How much a sinful being needs the good things of this earth!

[RIINA comes forth unwillingly.]

KUIGU-SIIM: So, Riina? Why do you stand there drooping like a frozen crow?

RIINA: Did they let you off?

KUIGU-SIIM: Say first, woman, would it make you glad or sad?

VANA-KAI (*stroking her son's sleeve*): God bless you—Siim, darling.

[KUIGU-SIIM slowly takes off his sheepskin coat, revealing the metal disc on the lapel of his coat.]

VANA-KAI (*shrieking*): Lord Jesus! the Tsar's coin!

RIINA: They took you after all—did they?

KUIGU-SIIM: Ay, they did. A shining medal on my chest just like any great Baron or Warlord. Tinkles like a sleigh-bell.

VANA-KAI (*sobbing loudly*): They took you after all, Siim! And left me, a clod of earth. Four boards—that's all there's left for me. My son, my son!

KUIGU-SIIM: Now then, mother, don't start off at once as though we were at a funeral. No one lives twice or dies twice. This lad's as jolly as if there were two ears of rye on each stalk.

VANA-KAI: Oh, there are seven eyes in his head. You've been sitting in the tavern on your way home. God's good grain has stolen your wits.

KUIGU-SIIM: I rested the mare at the tavern. Where's the man dares knock my cap askew! Do you think this world stands upright for the sake of the rich—it's for the sake of the poor, say I. (*He shakes his fist.*) This mallet's made of five

fingers. They weren't washed in milk, these fists; they grew hard gripping the sledge-hammer. (*He sits down on the bench, slowly sobering.*) Riina, come here! I want to praise you in an empty church and a dry tavern. Guess, what is it: a silver head, a golden knob, but crackles like a juniper?

[RIINA comes over to him.

KUIGU-SIIM: A spiteful wife is like dry rot in a man's bones. Sit there—you haven't said anything yet. So light, I could blow you from earth to heaven. I'll show you five miracles yet, and every miracle separately.

VANA-KAI (*still weeping*): Death every day and under my feet, no one to close my eyes. My grey head's drawn towards the grave. This is what the coals foretold. O, little Jesus! let me die against the wall.

KUIGU-SIIM: Boldness won't help with God and our masters. Who asks people like us to pit their strength against their betters? Let the poor keep to the poor, a crow to the crows. —Riina, how old are you?

RIINA: Twenty-one since haytime—Mary's Day.

KUIGU-SIIM: Twenty-one. Add twenty-five—that makes six and forty. Riina, you'll be forty-six when I come back. Have you heard that wheat-cake and a girl's youth don't keep their freshness long?—Any brandy at home?

RIINA: No.

KUIGU-SIIM: Brandy, woman!

RIINA: Where am I to get it, when there isn't any?

KUIGU-SIIM: Where? From the Devil's eye, if you like.

VANA-KAI: Jesus! Jesus!

KUIGU-SIIM: Ale then. Bring ale, woman!

RIINA (*brings home-brewed ale in a wooden tankard*): There—there's your ale.

KUIGU-SIIM: You drink too, Riina.

RIINA: I'm not thirsty.

KUIGU-SIIM: You drink that down and you'll get a son.



VANA-KAI (*lamenting*): There's no more mercy or justice left than the sands of Heaven and the soil of earth. I'm left as lonely as the Maker's dove.

KUIGU-SIIM (*drinking from the tankard*): Sentence is as pronounced and justice as it is read. What justice does a peasant get? Big as a haystack when it leaves the king, and when it gets here, not enough to put in a pipe. (*Drinks. Turning to RIINA*) Who can close the mouth of the great Manor Lords? And what good does it do you? Better the leg of a mosquito in your cabbage than no meat. What do you say, Riina?

[RIINA *does not answer.*]

KUIGU-SIIM: Why are you so downhearted, Riina? Trying to show you'll miss me? We've lain together, you and I, as close as two boards at the sawmill. Let the woman stay in the house, I say, lest the wolf carry her away. A widow you'll be now, like a crane in the marsh, but you'll get no man, however you try, for I'll be holding you all that way off like a vice. (*Drinks.*) Is it because of me that you're sad, Riina?

[RIINA *hides her face as she bursts into tears.*]

KUIGU-SIIM (*softly*): A little anyhow—I don't ask for much. When I'm away you'll remember, whether you want to or no. (*To VANA-KAI*) Listen, Mother. Stop that moaning. Answer me this.

VANA-KAI (*amidst her weeping*): What now, my son?

KUIGU-SIIM: Why have you never said evening prayers, mother? Father used to. We've been sinful, sinful. But now we're going to repent. Where's the Bible? Riina, hey, where's the Bible?

RIINA: What do you want it for?

KUIGU-SIIM: You'll see. Bring it here. Where is it?

RIINA: On that shelf.

KUIGU-SIIM: Give me the Book of Books. Look what an obedient wife I have—she doesn't refuse. Young she is, smooth as melted goose-fat, and eyes that shine like blackberries.



VANA-KAI: What play is this with the Holy Book, boy? What are you going to do?

KUIGU-SIIM: Read to you from the Bible, the Word of God to feed your souls. No, Riina shall do it. Her voice is clear, she reads aloud well. I'd like to hear about King David—where does that come?

RIINA (*turns over the pages with trembling fingers—nearly drops the Bible*): I—don't quite remember.

KUIGU-SIIM: You Pharisee!—you don't know the Holy book? Mother, what about you?

VANA-KAI: What page is it you mean?

KUIGU-SIIM: What I want to hear about is how King David coveted another man's wife—Uriah's woman. Bath-sheba.

VANA-KAI: Isn't that in the Second Book of Samuel?

RIINA (*turning the pages*): I can't find it.

KUIGU-SIIM: Give me the Holy Book—I'll look for it. There, there it is, start reading. And mind you read plainly, woman.

RIINA: It's too dark here, my eyes turn dim.

KUIGU-SIIM: Let's have another light. (*He lights a fresh slat.*) Well, now there's light as from God's candles. (*With emphasis*) Read, woman!

RIINA (*begins to read, haltingly, in a monotonous tone, swallowing her words*): "And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when the kings go forth to battle . . ."

KUIGU-SIIM: Clearer, clearer, woman! In a loud voice and clearer, I say!

RIINA (*continues in a loud voice*): ". . . that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel: and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still in Jerusalem.

"And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon.

“ And David sent and inquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bath-sheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite ? ”

*[She drops the book and bursts into tears.]*

KUIGU-SIIM (*picking up the book from the floor*): You have dropped the Holy Book, woman. But listen, I'll read you the next few verses. (*Reads.*)

“ And it came to pass in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah.

“ And he wrote in the letter saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die.

“ And it came to pass, when Joab observed the city, that he assigned Uriah unto a place where he knew that valiant men were.

“ And the men of the city went out, and fought with Joab : and there fell some of the people of the servants of David ; and Uriah the Hittite died also.”

*[He closes the book.]*

Mother—Riina, what do you think of Uriah ? He took the king's letter to the leader himself. Fancy calling himself a man—pah !—an old foot-rag. The order for his own death—ha ! ha ! A soft fellow, a fool if there was one, and not so much brains in his head as a pinch of snuff—ch !

RIINA (*in great agony of soul*): Ah, Holy God in Heaven !

KUIGU-SIIM: Riina, when you came back from the Baron's, didn't you know what was in the letter ?

*[RIINA does not reply.]*

VANA-KAI: I knew. I knew all the time. Riina knew too. I saw that she knew.

KUIGU-SIIM: Be quiet, mother, this is between Riina and me, only God a third.—Answer, woman, didn't you guess what was in the letter ?

RIINA (*embracing SIIM's knees*): Have mercy !

KUIGU-SIIM: Get up, and don't hug my knees, I'm no Lord of the Manor. Answer in the name of God everlasting and His only Son and the Holy Ghost—lay your finger on the Bible.

RIINA (*with her finger on the Book*): I guessed.

KUIGU-SIIM: Swear after me, then—"In the name of God everlasting . . ."

RIINA: In the name of God everlasting and His only-begotten Son and the Holy Ghost—I guessed.

KUIGU-SIIM: There now—I knew it. And now the rest. Speak to me as you would to a priest on your deathbed. Confess your sins, woman. Go on.

RIINA: Don't kill me, Siim !

KUIGU-SIIM: Speak, woman ! What happened yesterday at the manor ?

RIINA: I went to the Lord Baron . . .

KUIGU-SIIM: And then ?

RIINA: I said to him that you had been called up to be passed.

KUIGU-SIIM: And then ? What then ?

RIINA: The Baron said: "You'll be left alone then, now."

KUIGU-SIIM: Was that all ?

VANA-KAI: Be hard on her, make her tell you, boy ! Ay, indeed ! You're not worth even so much as the water in a loaf.

KUIGU-SIIM: Was that all ? You've got to confess now. There's no getting out of it.

RIINA: He said: "Twenty-five years is a long time."

KUIGU-SIIM: Go on !

RIINA: I said: "Have mercy, Lord Baron, write a letter to the army gentlemen in the town and they won't take Siim." He only said: "Never fear, you'll be taken care of."

KUIGU-SIIM: And you ? What did you say ? Tell the truth, woman !

VANA-KAI: Wriggle as much as you like, like a sprat on the coals, it won't help you.

RIINA: He came and tried to get hold of me. I said: "Have mercy on Siim, dear Lord Baron!" But he only said: "Do you want to have a good time?" Then I . . .

KUIGU-SIIM (*grasping her*): Then you . . . ?

RIINA: Oh, God!

KUIGU-SIIM: Yes or no? Did he take you? Yes or no?

RIINA: Don't kill me!

KUIGU-SIIM: Yes or no?

RIINA: Yes.

[KUIGU-SIIM *loosens his grasp. Silence.*

VANA-KAI: Jesus—Jesus! And a while back she swore that she was pure as a star in heaven. (*To RIINA*) Oh, that you might vanish off the face of the earth like dew from grass! Your sins are too big for the cauldrons of Hell—they'd make even that boil over.

KUIGU-SIIM: Be quiet, mother. (*To RIINA in a harsh, changed voice*) And then?

RIINA: He wrote the letter and told me to give it to you.

KUIGU-SIIM: And you gave the letter into my hand and said nothing.

RIINA: I said nothing.

KUIGU-SIIM: Though you knew what was in the letter?

RIINA: I didn't know for sure.

KUIGU-SIIM: Well, you guessed.

RIINA: Yes—perhaps.

KUIGU-SIIM: And you let me carry it off thinking it was an order for my freedom?

RIINA: Yes, have mercy!

KUIGU-SIIM (*seizes RIINA roughly by the throat. She sinks to the floor.*): Now to wrestle with God! Mind I don't strike you so that the red blood flies! (*Still squeezing RIINA by the throat*) You Baron's thing. You ought to be burned in fire and tar!

RIINA (*faintly*): Don't kill me—mercy—I didn't—want . . .

VANA-KAI (*vainly trying to loosen SIIM's hold of RIINA*): Let go! Do you hear, Siim! Don't kill the wretch—Siim! Don't commit murder!

KUIGU-SIIM (*still choking RIINA*): May the Devil take you and leave nothing but drops of blood!

[*RIINA is left lying lifeless on the floor.*]

VANA-KAI (*loudly lamenting*): What have you done, my son, what have you done! O! what a wretch I am—all the while I was egging you on! Now you'll never come back any more, not in this life. Now they'll take you for good and all.

[*KUIGU-SIIM gets up staggering and looks horror-stricken at RIINA. He shakes her and listens to her heart and breathing.*]

VANA-KAI: Oh, my son, my son! You've killed her! Now they'll take you away from me. Now you won't come back until the last day to be judged by God.

KUIGU-SIIM (*sinks, broken, on to the bench*): Bath-sheba, a poor man's ewe lamb!

CURTAIN



Maurice Maeterlinck

INTERIOR

*A Drama*

TRANSLATED  
BY WILLIAM ARCHER

## CHARACTERS

### *In the Garden—*

THE OLD MAN

THE STRANGER

MARTHA } grand-daughters of the Old Man  
MARY }

A PEASANT

THE CROWD

### *In the House—*

THE FATHER

THE MOTHER

THE TWO DAUGHTERS

THE CHILD

} silent personages

*An old garden planted with willows. At the back, a house, with three of the ground-floor windows lighted up. Through them a family is pretty distinctly visible, gathered for the evening round the lamp. THE FATHER is seated at the chimney-corner. THE MOTHER, resting one elbow on the table, is gazing into vacancy. TWO YOUNG GIRLS, dressed in white, sit at their embroidery, dreaming and smiling in the tranquillity of the room. A child is asleep, his head resting on his mother's left arm. When one of them rises, walks, or makes a gesture, the movements appear grave, slow, apart, and as though spiritualized by the distance, the light, and the transparent film of the window-panes.*

THE OLD MAN and THE STRANGER enter the garden cautiously.

THE OLD MAN: Here we are in the part of the garden that lies behind the house. They never come here. The doors are on the other side. They are closed and the shutters shut. But there are no shutters on this side of the house, and I saw the light. . . . Yes, they are still sitting up in the lamp-light. It is well that they have not heard us; the mother or the girls would perhaps have come out, and then what should we have done?

THE STRANGER: What are we going to do?

THE OLD MAN: I want first to see if they are all in the room. Yes, I see the father seated at the chimney-corner. He is doing nothing, his hands resting on his knees. The mother is leaning her elbow on the table. . . .

THE STRANGER: She is looking at us.

THE OLD MAN: No, she is looking at nothing; her eyes are fixed. She cannot see us; we are in the shadow of the great trees. But do not go any nearer. . . . There, too, are the dead girl's two sisters; they are embroidering slowly. And the little child has fallen asleep. It is nine on the clock in the corner. . . . They divine no evil, and they do not speak.

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THE STRANGER: If we were to attract the father's attention, and make some sign to him? He has turned his head this way. Shall I knock at one of the windows? One of them will have to hear of it before the others. . . .

THE OLD MAN: I do not know which to choose. . . . We must be very careful. The father is old and ailing—the mother too—and the sisters are too young. . . . And they all loved her as they will never love again. I have never seen a happier household. . . . No, no! do not go up to the window; that would be the worst thing we could do. It is better that we should tell them of it as simply as we can, as though it were a commonplace occurrence; and we must not appear too sad, else they will feel that their sorrow must exceed ours, and they will not know what to do. . . . Let us go round to the other side of the garden. We will knock at the door, and go in as if nothing had happened. I will go in first: they will not be surprised to see me; I sometimes look in of an evening, to bring them some flowers or fruit, and to pass an hour or two with them.

THE STRANGER: Why do you want me to go with you? Go alone; I will wait until you call me. They have never seen me—I am only a passer-by, a stranger. . . .

THE OLD MAN: It is better that I should not be alone. A misfortune announced by a single voice seems more definite and crushing. I thought of that as I came along. . . . If I go in alone, I shall have to speak at the very first moment; they will know all in a few words; I shall have nothing more to say; and I dread the silence which follows the last words that tell of a misfortune. It is then that the heart is torn. If we enter together, I shall go roundabout to work; I shall tell them, for example: "They found her thus, or thus. . . . She was floating on the stream, and her hands were clasped. . . ."

THE STRANGER: Her hands were not clasped; her arms were floating at her sides.

THE OLD MAN: You see, in spite of ourselves we begin to talk—and the misfortune is shrouded in its details. Otherwise, if I go in alone, I know them well enough to be sure that the very first words would produce a terrible effect,

and God knows what would happen. But if we speak to them in turns, they will listen to us, and will forget to look the evil tidings in the face. Do not forget that the mother will be there, and that her life hangs by a thread. . . . It is well that the first wave of sorrow should waste its strength in unnecessary words. It is wisest to let people gather round the unfortunate and talk as they will. Even the most indifferent carry off, without knowing it, some portion of the sorrow. It is dispersed without effort and without noise, like air or light. . . .

THE STRANGER: Your clothes are soaked and are dripping on the flagstones.

THE OLD MAN: It is only the skirt of my mantle that has trailed a little in the water. You seem to be cold. Your coat is all muddy . . . I did not notice it on the way, it was so dark.

THE STRANGER: I went into the water up to my waist.

THE OLD MAN: Had you found her long when I came up?

THE STRANGER: Only a few moments. I was going towards the village; it was already late, and the dusk was falling on the river bank. I was walking along with my eyes fixed on the river, because it was lighter than the road, when I saw something strange close by a tuft of reeds. . . . I drew nearer, and I saw her hair, which had floated up almost into a circle round her head, and was swaying hither and thither with the current. . . .

*[In the room, THE TWO YOUNG GIRLS turn their heads towards the window.]*

THE OLD MAN: Did you see her two sisters' hair trembling on their shoulders?

THE STRANGER: They turned their heads in our direction—they simply turned their heads. Perhaps I was speaking too loudly. (THE TWO GIRLS resume their former position.) They have turned away again already. . . . I went into the water up to my waist, and then I managed to grasp her hand and easily drew her to the bank. She was as beautiful as her sisters. . . .



THE OLD MAN: I think she was more beautiful. . . . I do not know why I have lost all my courage. . . .

THE STRANGER: What courage do you mean? We did all that man could do. She had been dead for more than a hour.

THE OLD MAN: She was living this morning! I met her coming out of the church. She told me that she was going away; she was going to see her grandmother on the other side of the river in which you found her. She did not know when I should see her again. . . . She seemed to be on the point of asking me something; then I suppose she did not dare, and she left me abruptly. But now that I think of it—and I noticed nothing at the time!—she smiled as people smile who want to be silent, or who fear that they will not be understood. . . . Even hope seemed like a pain to her; her eyes were veiled, and she scarcely looked at me.

THE STRANGER: Some peasants told me that they saw her wandering all the afternoon upon the bank. They thought she was looking for flowers. . . . It is possible that her death . . .

THE OLD MAN: No one can tell. . . . What can anyone know? She was perhaps one of those who shrink from speech, and everyone bears in his breast more than one reason for ceasing to live. You cannot see into the soul as you see into that room. They are all like that—they say nothing but trivial things, and no one dreams that there is aught amiss. You live for months by the side of one who is no longer of this world, and whose soul cannot stoop to it; you answer her unthinkingly; and you see what happens. They look like lifeless puppets, and all the time so many things are passing in their souls. They do not themselves know what they are. She might have lived as the others live. She might have said to the day of her death: "Sir, or Madam, it will rain this morning," or, "We are going to lunch; we shall be thirteen at table," or "The fruit is not yet ripe." They speak smilingly of the flowers that have fallen, and they weep in the darkness. An angel from heaven would not see what ought to be seen; and men understand nothing until after all is over. . . . Yesterday evening she was there, sitting in the lamplight, like her sisters; and you

would not see them now as they ought to be seen if this had not happened. . . . I seem to see her for the first time. . . . Something new must come into our ordinary life before we can understand it. They are at your side day and night; and you do not really see them until the moment when they depart for ever. And yet, what a strange little soul she must have had—what a poor little, artless, unfathomable soul she must have had—to have said what she must have said, and done what she must have done !

THE STRANGER : See, they are smiling in the silence of the room. . . .

THE OLD MAN : They are not at all anxious—they did not expect her this evening.

THE STRANGER : They sit motionless and smiling. But see, the father puts his fingers to his lips. . . .

THE OLD MAN : He points to the child asleep on its mother's breast. . . .

THE STRANGER : She dares not raise her head for fear of disturbing it. . . .

THE OLD MAN : They are not sewing any more. There is a dead silence. . . .

THE STRANGER : They have let fall their skein of white silk. . . .

THE OLD MAN : They are looking at the child. . . .

THE STRANGER : They do not know that others are looking at them. . . .

THE OLD MAN : We, too, are watched. . . .

THE STRANGER : They have raised their eyes. . . .

THE OLD MAN : And yet they can see nothing. . . .

THE STRANGER : They seem to be happy, and yet there is something—I cannot tell what. . . .

THE OLD MAN : They think themselves beyond the reach of danger. They have closed the doors, and the windows are barred with iron. They have strengthened the wall of the old house; they have shot the bolts of the three oaken doors. They have foreseen everything that can be foreseen. . . .

THE STRANGER: Sooner or later we must tell them. Someone might come and blurt it out abruptly. There was a crowd of peasants in the meadow where we left the dead girl—if one of them were to come and knock at the door. . . .

THE OLD MAN: Martha and Mary are watching the little body. The peasants were going to make a litter of branches; and I told my eldest grand-daughter to hurry on and let us know the moment they made a start. Let us wait till she comes; she will go with me. . . . I wish we had not been able to watch them in this way. I thought there was nothing to do but to knock at the door, to enter quite simply, and to tell all in a few phrases. . . . But I have watched them too long, living in the lamplight. . . .

[Enter MARY.

MARY: They are coming, grandfather.

THE OLD MAN: Is that you? Where are they?

MARY: They are at the foot of the last slope.

THE OLD MAN: They are coming silently.

MARY: I told them to pray in a low voice. Martha is with them.

THE OLD MAN: Are there many of them?

MARY: The whole village is around the bier. They had brought lanterns; I bade them put them out.

THE OLD MAN: What way are they coming?

MARY: They are coming by the little paths. They are moving slowly.

THE OLD MAN: It is time. . . .

MARY: Have you told them, grandfather?

THE OLD MAN: You can see that we have told them nothing. There they are, still sitting in the lamplight. Look, my child, look: you will see what life is. . . .

MARY: Oh! how peaceful they seem! I feel as though I were seeing them in a dream.

THE STRANGER: Look there—I saw the two sisters give a start.

THE OLD MAN: They are rising. . . .

THE STRANGER: I believe they are coming to the windows.

*[At this moment ONE OF THE TWO SISTERS comes up to the first window, THE OTHER to the third; and resting their hands against the panes they stand gazing into the darkness.]*

THE OLD MAN: No one comes to the middle window.

MARY: They are looking out; they are listening. . . .

THE OLD MAN: The elder is smiling at what she does not see.

THE STRANGER: The eyes of the second are full of fear.

THE OLD MAN: Take care: who knows how far the soul may extend around the body. . . .

*[A long silence. MARY nestles close to THE OLD MAN's breast and kisses him.]*

MARY: Grandfather!

THE OLD MAN: Do not weep, my child; our turn will come.

*[A pause.]*

THE STRANGER: They are looking long. . . .

THE OLD MAN: Poor things, they would see nothing though they looked for a hundred thousand years—the night is too dark. They are looking this way; and it is from the other that misfortune is coming.

THE STRANGER: It is well that they are looking this way. Something, I do not know what, is approaching by way of the meadows.

MARY: I think it is the crowd; they are too far off for us to see clearly.

THE STRANGER: They are following the windings of the path—there they come in sight again on that moonlit slope.

MARY: Oh! how many they seem to be. Even when I left, people were coming up from the outskirts of the town. They are taking a very roundabout way. . . .

THE OLD MAN: They will arrive at last, none the less. I see them, too—they are crossing the meadows—they look



so small that one can scarcely distinguish them among the herbage. You might think them children playing in the moonlight; if the girls saw them they would not understand. Turn their backs to it as they may, misfortune is approaching step by step, and has been looming larger for more than two hours past. They cannot bid it stay; and those who are bringing it are powerless to stop it. It has mastered them, too, and they must needs serve it. It knows its goal, and it takes its course. It is unwearying, and it has but one idea. They have to lend it their strength. They are sad, but they draw nearer. Their hearts are full of pity, but they must advance. . . .

MARY: The elder has ceased to smile, grandfather.

THE STRANGER: They are leaving the windows. . . .

MARY: They are kissing their mother. . . .

THE STRANGER: The elder is stroking the child's curls without wakening it.

MARY: Ah! the father wants them to kiss him, too. . . .

THE STRANGER: Now there is silence. . . .

MARY: They have returned to their mother's side.

THE STRANGER: And the father keeps his eyes fixed on the great pendulum of the clock. . . .

MARY: They seem to be praying without knowing what they do. . . .

THE STRANGER: They seem to be listening to their own souls. . . .

[*A pause.*]

MARY: Grandfather, do not tell them this evening!

THE OLD MAN: You see, you are losing courage, too. I knew you ought not to look at them. I am nearly eighty-three years old, and this is the first time that the reality of life has come home to me. I do not know why all they do appears to me so strange and solemn. There they sit awaiting the night, simply, under their lamp, as we should under our own; and yet I seem to see them from the altitude of another world, because I know a little fact which as yet



they do not know. . . . Is it so, my children ? Tell me, why are you, too, pale ? Perhaps there is something else that we cannot put in words, and that makes us weep ? I did not know that there was anything so sad in life, or that it could strike such terror to those who look on at it. And even if nothing had happened, it would frighten me to see them sit there so peacefully. They have too much confidence in this world. There they sit, separated from the enemy by only a few poor panes of glass. They think that nothing will happen because they have closed their doors, and they do not know that it is in the soul that things always happen, and that the world does not end at their house-door. They are so secure of their little life, and do not dream that so many others know more of it than they, and that I, poor old man, at two steps from their door, hold all their little happiness, like a wounded bird, in the hollow of my old hands, and dare not open them. . . .

MARY: Have pity on them, grandfather. . . .

THE OLD MAN: We have pity on them, my child, but no one has pity on us.

MARY: Tell them to-morrow, grandfather ; tell them when it is light, then they will not be so sad.

THE OLD MAN: Perhaps you are right, my child. . . . It would be better to leave all this in the night. And the daylight is sweet to sorrow. . . . But what would they say to us to-morrow ? Misfortune makes people jealous ; those upon whom it has fallen want to know of it before strangers—they do not like to leave it in unknown hands. We should seem to have robbed them of something.

THE STRANGER: Besides, it is too late now ; already I can hear the murmur of prayers.

MARY: They are here—they are passing behind the hedges.

[Enter MARTHA.

MARTHA: Here I am. I have guided them hither—I told them to wait in the road. (*Cries of children are heard.*) Ah ! the children are still crying. I forbade them to come, but they want to see, too, and the mothers would not obey me. I will go and tell them—no, they have stopped crying. Is

everything ready? I have brought the little ring that was found upon her. I have some fruit, too, for the child. I laid her to rest myself upon the bier. She looks as though she were sleeping. I had a great deal of trouble with her hair—I could not arrange it properly. I made them gather marguerites—it is a pity there were no other flowers. What are you doing here? Why are you not with them? (*She looks in at the windows.*) They are not weeping! They—you have not told them!

THE OLD MAN: Martha, Martha, there is too much life in your soul; you cannot understand. . . .

MARTHA: Why should I not understand? (*After a silence, and in a tone of grave reproach*) You ought not to have done that, grandfather. . . .

THE OLD MAN: Martha, you do not know. . . .

MARTHA: I will go and tell them.

THE OLD MAN: Remain here, my child, and look for a moment.

MARTHA: Oh, how I pity them! They must wait no longer. . . .

THE OLD MAN: Why not?

MARTHA: I do not know, but it is not possible!

THE OLD MAN: Come here, my child. . . .

MARTHA: How patient they are!

THE OLD MAN: Come here, my child. . . .

MARTHA (*turning*): Where are you, grandfather? I am so unhappy, I cannot see you any more. I do not myself know now what to do. . . .

THE OLD MAN: Do not look any more; until they know all. . . .

MARTHA: I want to go with you. . . .

THE OLD MAN: No, Martha, stay here. Sit beside your sister on this old stone bench against the wall of the house, and do not look. You are too young, you would never be able to forget it. You cannot know what a face looks like at the moment when Death is passing into its eyes. Perhaps

they will cry out, too. . . . Do not turn round. Perhaps there will be no sound at all. Above all things, if there is no sound, be sure you do not turn and look. One can never foresee the course that sorrow will take. A few little sobs wrung from the depths, and generally that is all. I do not know myself what I shall do when I hear them—they do not belong to this life. Kiss me, my child, before I go.

*[The murmur of prayers has gradually drawn nearer. A portion of THE CROWD forces its way into the garden. There is a sound of deadened footfalls and of whispering.]*

THE STRANGER (to THE CROWD): Stop here—do not go near the window. Where is she?

A PEASANT: Who?

THE STRANGER: The others—the bearers.

A PEASANT: They are coming by the avenue that leads up to the door.

*[THE OLD MAN goes out. MARTHA and MARY have seated themselves on the bench, their backs to the windows. Low murmurings are heard among THE CROWD.]*

THE STRANGER: Hush! Do not speak.

*[In the room THE TALLER OF THE TWO SISTERS rises, goes to the door, and shoots the bolts.]*

MARTHA: She is opening the door?

THE STRANGER: On the contrary, she is fastening it.

*[A pause.]*

MARTHA: Grandfather has not come in?

THE STRANGER: No. She takes her seat again at her mother's side. The others do not move, and the child is still sleeping.

*[A pause.]*

MARTHA: My little sister, give me your hands.

MARY: Martha!

*[They embrace and kiss each other.]*

THE STRANGER: He must have knocked—they have all raised their heads at the same time—they are looking at each other.

MARTHA: Oh ! Oh ! my poor little sister ! I can scarcely help crying out, too.

*[She smothers her sobs on her sister's shoulder.]*

THE STRANGER: He must have knocked again. The father is looking at the clock. He rises. . . .

MARTHA: Sister, sister, I must go in too—they cannot be left alone.

MARY: Martha, Martha !

*[She holds her back.]*

THE STRANGER: The father is at the door—he is drawing the bolts—he is opening it cautiously.

MARTHA: Oh !—you do not see the . . .

THE STRANGER: What ?

MARTHA: The bearers. . . .

THE STRANGER: He has only opened it a very little. I see nothing but a corner of the lawn and the fountain. He keeps his hand on the door—He takes a step back—he seems to be saying, “ Ah, it is you ! ” He raises his arms. He carefully closes the door again. Your grandfather has entered the room. . . .

*[THE CROWD has come up to the window. MARTHA and MARY half rise from their seat, then rise altogether and follow the rest towards the windows, pressing close to each other. THE OLD MAN is seen advancing into the room. THE TWO SISTERS rise; THE MOTHER also rises, and carefully settles THE CHILD in the armchair which she has left, so that from the outside the little one can be seen sleeping, his head a little bent forward, in the middle of the room. THE MOTHER advances to meet THE OLD MAN, and holds out her hand to him, but draws it back again before he has had time to take it. ONE OF THE GIRLS wants to take off the visitor's mantle, and THE OTHER pushes forward an armchair for him. But THE OLD MAN makes a little gesture of refusal. THE FATHER smiles with an air of astonishment. THE OLD MAN looks towards the windows.]*



THE STRANGER: He dares not tell them. He is looking towards us.

[*Murmurs in THE CROWD.*

THE STRANGER: Hush !

[THE OLD MAN, *seeing faces at the windows, quickly averts his eyes. As ONE OF THE GIRLS is still offering him the armchair, he at last sits down and passes his right hand several times over his forehead.*

THE STRANGER: He is sitting down. . . .

[*The others who are in the room also sit down, while THE FATHER seems to be speaking volubly. At last THE OLD MAN opens his mouth, and the sound of his voice seems to arouse their attention. But THE FATHER interrupts him. THE OLD MAN begins to speak again, and little by little the others grow tense with apprehension. All of a sudden THE MOTHER starts and rises.*

MARTHA: Oh ! the mother begins to understand !

[*She turns away and hides her face in her hands. Renewed murmurs among THE CROWD. They elbow each other. Children cry to be lifted up, so that they may see too. Most of the mothers do as they wish.*

THE STRANGER: Hush ! he has not told them yet. . . .

[THE MOTHER *is seen to be questioning THE OLD MAN with anxiety. He says a few more words ; then, suddenly, all the others rise, too, and seem to question him. Then he slowly makes an affirmative movement of his head.*

THE STRANGER: He has told them—he has told them all at once !

VOICES IN THE CROWD: He has told them ! He has told them !

THE STRANGER: I can hear nothing. . . .

[THE OLD MAN *also rises, and, without turning, makes a gesture indicating the door, which is behind him. THE MOTHER, THE FATHER, and THE TWO DAUGHTERS rush to this door, which THE FATHER has difficulty in opening. THE OLD MAN tries to prevent THE MOTHER from going out.*



VOICES IN THE CROWD: They are going out ! They are going out !

*[Confusion among THE CROWD in the garden. All hurry to the other side of the house and disappear, except THE STRANGER, who remains at the windows. In the room, the folding door is at last thrown wide open ; all go out at the same time. Beyond can be seen the starry sky, the lawn and the fountain in the moonlight ; while, left alone in the middle of the room, THE CHILD continues to sleep peacefully in the armchair. A pause.]*

THE STRANGER: The child has not awakened !

*[He also goes out.]*

CURTAIN

Luigi Pirandello

6904

THE MAN WITH THE FLOWER  
IN HIS MOUTH

*A Dialogue*

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN  
BY ARTHUR LIVINGSTON

## CHARACTERS

THE MAN WITH THE FLOWER IN HIS MOUTH

THE OTHER – a season-ticket holder, with time on his hands

Twice during the dialogue, a WOMAN, in a black dress and an old hat with drooping feathers, will appear round the corner.

SCENE: *An avenue, lined with trees, electric lights gleaming through the foliage. On either side, the last houses of a street crossing the avenue. Among the houses L., a cheap all-night café, with tables and chairs on the pavement. In front of the houses R., a street-lamp, lighted. Astride the angle made by the two walls of the house to the L. (it has a front both on the street and on the avenue), a street-lamp, also lighted. It is shortly after midnight. At intervals, from a distance, comes the faint thrumming of a mandolin.*

*As the curtain rises, THE MAN WITH THE FLOWER IN HIS MOUTH is seated at one of the tables, silently observing THE OTHER, who, at a neighbouring table, is sipping a mint frappé through a straw.*

MAN WITH THE FLOWER: Ah! . . . I was just going to say. . . . You seem a good-natured sort of fellow. . . . You lost your train?

OTHER: By less than a minute. I get to the station, and there it is—just pulling out!

MAN WITH THE FLOWER: You might have caught it by running!

OTHER: I suppose I might! It's absurd, I know. If I hadn't been all cluttered up with a dozen packages, more or less—huh! worse than a packhorse! . . . Oh, these women! . . . One errand after another—world without end! Why, it took me three minutes, after I got out of my taxi, to get my fingers through the strings on all those packages! Two on every finger!

MAN WITH THE FLOWER: I'd like to have seen you! . . . You know what I would have done? I'd have left the blamed things in the taxi!

OTHER: And when you got home—eh? . . . How about the old woman—and my girls—not to mention the neighbours!

MAN WITH THE FLOWER: Shrieking, eh? . . . I'd have enjoyed it, I would!

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All applications for permission to perform this play should be made to the author's agents, the London Play Company, 51 Piccadilly, London, W.1; or, for Canada and the U.S.A., to Messrs. E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 286-302 Fourth Avenue, New York City.

OTHER: Guess you don't know what it's like to have a covey of women with you on a country holiday !

MAN WITH THE FLOWER: Oh, I guess I do—in fact, I say so because I do. . . . (*A pause.*) They all say they won't need to take a thing ! . . .

OTHER: And you think they let it rest at that ? According to them, they go into the country to save money. . . . Well, the moment they get to some place out there, in the backwoods—the uglier it is, the dirtier it is, the more they insist on dressing up with all their frills and fripperies ! Oh—women, my dear sir ! . . . But after all, it's the way they're made ! . . . “The next time you run into town, dear, I wish you'd call at So-and-So's. And then, if you don't mind, dear, on the way back—no trouble, is it, really ?” (The dear thing, no trouble !)—“you might call at my dressmaker's and” . . . And they're off ! . . . “But how am I going to get all that done in three hours ?” you say. . . . “Oh, that's easy ! . . . Take a taxi !” . . . And the worst of it is that, in my hurry to get away, I forgot to take the keys of my house here in Town ! . . .

MAN WITH THE FLOWER: Ah—that's a good one ! . . . And so ? . . .

OTHER: I left that pile of bundles in the left-luggage office at the station ; then I went to dinner in a restaurant, then, to get my temper back, to the theatre. . . . Hot ? . . . Hot wasn't the word for it ! . . . Coming out, I say to myself: “What next ? . . . Midnight ! . . . And the next train leaves at 4 a.m. ! Three hours left for a bit of a nap ! . . . Not worth the money !” . . . So here I am ! . . . This place doesn't shut up, I hope ? . . .

MAN WITH THE FLOWER: Never shuts up, this place. (*A pause.*) So you left your bundles in the left-luggage office, eh ?

OTHER: Why not ? Safe, aren't they ? All pretty well tied up !

MAN WITH THE FLOWER: No, no, I didn't mean that. . . . (*A pause.*) Well tied up, eh ? Oh, I can imagine. . . . Those shop assistants certainly know how to wrap a parcel up !



(*A pause.*) What hands they have ! . . . Here's a long strip of paper, double-thickness, pink, with wavy lines—ah ! a sight for sore eyes just by itself ! . . . How smooth ! You'd almost like to put your face on it to feel how cool it is. And they spread it out, there on the counter. And then, as nice as you please, they put your cloth in the middle of it, all neatly folded up. First, with the back of one hand they turn up one edge of the paper from underneath. Then they bring the other edge over and down ; and how deftly, how gracefully they turn the two edges over together to make a narrow fold they don't really need—just an extra for love of their art ! Then, first on one side and then on the other, they fold the corners down, to make two triangles. Then they turn the points under. . . . Then they reach for the twine with one hand . . . pull out just what they need, tie it up before you've really had time to admire their skill—and there they are, handing you your package, with a little loop to put your finger through ! . . .

OTHER : I must say, you seem to have watched the shop assistants pretty closely !

MAN WITH THE FLOWER : I ? . . . Huh. . . . I've watched them whole days at a time. Why, I can spend an hour in front of a store, looking through the show window ! Helps me to forget myself. . . . Why—I feel as though I were . . . Oh—I'd really like to be . . . that piece of silk in there—that strip of braid—that ribbon, red or blue, that the girls in the haberdashery department, after they've measured it with their tape-measure . . . did you ever notice what they do ? . . . They make an " 8 " of it around the thumb and little finger of the left hand, before they wrap it up . . . (*A pause.*) And I watch the customers, men or women, when they come out of the shop with the parcels, either in their hands, or under their arms, or hanging from one of their fingers. And I watch them till they are out of sight . . . imagining—uh-h ! . . . all that I imagine ! . . . You couldn't guess half of it ! (*A pause. Then gloomily, as though speaking to himself*) But it helps me—it helps me, it does ! It's good for me. . . .

OTHER : Helps you ! I don't see that ! How does it help you ?

MAN WITH THE FLOWER: Oh—it helps to attach me—in my imagination, I mean—attach me to life—like a vine to the bars of an iron gate. . . . (*A pause.*) Oh. . . . I try never to let it rest for a moment—my imagination! I cling with it, persistently, to life—to the lives of other people! Not of people I know! No, no! I couldn't—with people I know! That bores me, disgusts me, you've no idea how much! No! I cling to the lives of people I don't know—of strangers, with whom my imagination can work as it will. But not at random, notice, not at random! Oh, no! . . . On the contrary, taking careful account of the least things I notice, now in this person, now in that! And you have no idea how hard and how wonderfully it works—my imagination, till I succeed in getting to the bottom of all those lives. . . . I can see this man's house, for instance. I live in it. I come to feel actually there—down to the point of noticing—why, you know, every house has a certain faint odour peculiar to it? There's one in your house—there's one in mine! but in *our* houses, of course, we don't notice—because it's the very breath of our lives—if you follow me! Yes, I can see that you agree!

OTHER: Yes, because . . . I mean, you must have a gay time, imagining these things!

MAN WITH THE FLOWER (*wearily, after some reflection*): A gay time? I?

OTHER: Yes. . . . I can see you. . . .

MAN WITH THE FLOWER: Tell me, have you ever been to a good doctor?

OTHER: I? . . . No, why should I? . . . There's nothing wrong with me!

MAN WITH THE FLOWER: No, no. . . . I didn't say there was! I meant—have you ever noticed, in a doctor's surgery, the waiting-room where the patients sit until their turn comes?

OTHER: That, yes. . . . I once took my daughter to see a doctor. . . . Something wrong with her nerves.

MAN WITH THE FLOWER: Well—I wasn't prying, you know. I meant that those waiting-rooms . . . (*A pause.*) Did you

ever notice?—a black horse-hair sofa in some old-fashioned style . . . upholstered chairs, that hardly ever match . . . an armchair or two—huh!—second-hand stuff, picked up where they can find it, put there for the patients! . . . Nothing to do with the house, you see! . . . The doctor—huh! . . . for himself, for his wife and his wife's friends, he has quite a different sort of place—a fine sitting-room, comfortable, attractive, costly. . . . And how out of place one of those chairs in the sitting-room would be if you put it in there in the waiting-room for the patients . . . where you need things about as they are, nothing particular, good, decent things, of course, not too showy, things that will wear . . . because it'll be used by all sorts of people who come to see the doctor. I wonder . . . when you went to the doctor's with your daughter that time, did you notice the chairs or the sofa you sat on while you were waiting?

OTHER: To tell the truth, I didn't!

MAN WITH THE FLOWER: Oh, of course, you didn't—because you weren't ill! . . . (*A pause.*) But even sick people don't always notice—all taken up as they are with what's wrong with them. (*A pause.*) And yet, how often some of them sit there, looking so intently at one of their fingers, which is going round and round, making letters and numbers that have no meaning, on the varnished arm of the chair where they are sitting! They're thinking—they don't really see! (*A pause.*) But what a strange impression it makes on you, when you go through the waiting-room again, after the doctor has finished with you, and catch another glimpse of that chair where you were sitting just a few moments before—anxiously awaiting sentence on the disease you didn't yet know about! There it is, occupied, maybe by a new patient, likewise with his unknown affliction; or perhaps, empty, indifferent, waiting for somebody—anybody at all, to come and sit down in it. (*A pause.*) What were we saying? Oh, yes, I remember. The pleasure we take in imagining! But how do you suppose I came to think of a chair in one of those waiting-rooms in a surgery, where the patients sit waiting for their turn?

OTHER: Yes, in fact . . . I was wondering.

MAN WITH THE FLOWER: You don't see the connection ! . . . Neither do I ! (*A pause.*) The fact is that certain mental associations—oh ! between things worlds apart—are so peculiar to each of us, and they are determined by considerations, experiences, habits of mind, so individual, that people would never understand one another unless they avoided them when they talk. Nothing more illogical, sometimes, than these associations ! (*A pause.*) But the connection, perhaps, may be this: funny, eh ? Do you suppose those chairs get any pleasure out of imagining who the patient is to be who will next sit down in them, waiting for his turn to see the doctor—what disease he will have—where he will go—what he will do after he has been examined ? . . . No pleasure at all ! And so it is with me . . . no pleasure at all ! So many patients come, and they are there, poor chairs, just to be sat on, just to be occupied ! . . . Well—my job in life is something like theirs. Now this thing, and now that, occupies me. At this moment it happens to be you, and . . . pleasure ? Believe me, I find no pleasure in thinking of the train you lost—of the family you have waiting for you in the country—of all the annoyances I can imagine you experiencing.

OTHER: There are a lot of them, I can tell you !

MAN WITH THE FLOWER: Well, you ought to thank God that you've nothing worse than annoyances ! (*A pause.*) Some of us, you know, are worse off ! (*A pause.*) I was telling you that I need to attach myself in my imagination to the lives other people lead. But—in my peculiar way, without pleasure, without interest, even—in such a way, in fact—yes, just so—in such a way as to sense the annoyances they encounter . . . in such a way as to be able to understand how stupid and silly life is, so that no one, really, ought to care a snap about being rid of the thing ! (*With sullen rage*) And that's a good deal to prove, you know. It takes arguing and proof, continual examples, which we have to keep impressing upon ourselves, mercilessly; because, my dear sir—we don't know what it is, exactly—but it's there, just the same, it's there, and we all feel it, every one of us, catching us here, by the throats—a sort of constriction, a thirst for living that is never quenched, that can never be quenched ! Because life, as we live it



from moment to moment, is always so ravenously hungry for itself, it never lets us savour the full taste of it ! The savour of life is in the past, which always remains as something living within us. Our enjoyment of it comes to us from back there, from the memories which hold us bound. Bound to what ? Bound to these stupidities, precisely—to these annoyances, to all these silly illusions, all these insipid occupations of ours. Yes, yes, here this little bit of foolishness—there that little annoyance . . . little ? Why little ? Even this great misfortune—a real misfortune—yes, sir—four, five, ten years hence will have who knows what flavour for us, who knows what keen enjoyment, mingled with our tears ! And life—God ! Life—the moment we think of losing it, especially when it is only a matter of days. . . .

[*At this point, THE WOMAN, dressed in black, appears round the corner R.*

Look, do you see that—I mean, over there, at the corner ? You see that dark figure ? Ah ! She's gone again !

OTHER : Where ? . . . Who was it ?

MAN WITH THE FLOWER (*after a pause*) : She is keeping an eye on me from a distance. . . . Sometimes, you know, I feel almost like getting up and giving her a kick ! But what good would that do, after all ? . . . She's like one of those stray dogs that insist on following you, and the more you kick them, the closer they stick to your heels ! (*A pause.*) What that woman is going through on my account, you can't imagine, sir ! . . . Goes without her meals . . . rarely ever goes to bed. . . . Just follows me around, day and night, that way, at a distance ! . . . I wish she would pay a little more attention to her appearance ! She might brush her clothes once in a while, at least . . . and that old shoe she wears for a hat ! She looks more like a rag doll than a woman ! . . . Ah ! and the dust !—the white dust has settled on her hair, too, here, around her forehead . . . for ever . . . and barely thirty-four, at that ! . . . (*A pause.*) I get so angry with her sometimes—you've no idea ! . . . And I lose my temper—and I go up to her, and I almost scream in her face : "Idiot ! . . . Idiot !" . . . And I give her a shaking ! . . . But she doesn't do a thing ! She swallows it all,



and just stands there looking at me, with eyes . . . with eyes. . . . Well—I could choke the life out of her ! But it's no use—she waits till I am some distance off—and then she takes up the trail again ! . . .

*[At this point THE WOMAN's head again appears round the corner.]*

Look ! . . . Look ! . . . There she is again ! . . . See her ? Did you see her ?

OTHER : The poor thing !

MAN WITH THE FLOWER : Poor thing ! . . . Huh ! . . . Do you know what that woman wants of me ? She wants me to stay quiet, peaceful-like, at home, where she can cuddle me and humour me with her tenderest and most affectionate attentions ! . . . Every room in perfect order . . . every piece of furniture in its place—and the varnish clean and polished. . . . Silence . . . the deadly silence of a mirror . . . broken only by the tick-tock . . . tick-tock . . . of the grandfather's clock in our dining-room ! . . . Huh ! . . . That's her notion of life ! . . . Well, now, I ask you, to give you some idea of the absurdity . . . absurdity ?—the downright cruelty, I would say rather—of her view of things—I ask you whether you suppose that the houses of Avezzano, or the houses of Messina, knowing that the earthquake was going to topple them over within a very few hours, could have been persuaded to sit still there, under the moonlight—all in nice straight lines, along the streets and squares, eh ? The way the Town Planning Committee decided they ought to be ? . . . No, sir ! Brick and stone though they were, they would have found legs, somehow, to run away ! And the people who lived in them—do you think that if they had known what was going to happen to them, they would have gone to their bedrooms that night as usual—folded their clothes up nicely, set their shoes outside their doors, and then crawled comfortably into bed between their nice warm sheets, knowing for certain that in a few hours they would be dead ? . . . Do you think they would ?

OTHER : But perhaps your wife . . .

MAN WITH THE FLOWER : Just a moment. . . . If death, my dear sir, were like one of those dirty malaria mosquitoes you

sometimes find walking up your coat sleeve. . . . Here you are, going along the pavement. . . . A man comes up to you, all of a sudden—stops you, and then, cautiously, holding out two fingers of his hand, says to you, “Beg pardon. May I save your life?” . . . And with those two fingers he skips the mosquito off! . . . Ah! . . . That would be fine! . . . But death isn’t like one of those loathsome insects! Many people go walking round, care-free, indifferent as you please, and with death perhaps upon them! Crowds brush their elbows, but no one notices anything; and they are themselves absorbed in what they are going to do to-morrow or the next day. . . . Now, I, my dear sir—look! (*He gets up.*) Just step this way! (*He draws THE OTHER aside until they are standing in the full light of the street-lamp.*) Look, I want to show you something. . . . See this spot, under my moustache? A pretty violet colour, isn’t it? . . . Do you know what they call it? A pretty name, like a verse from a poem: E-pi-the-li-o-ma! . . . Say it yourself, and you’ll notice how nice it sounds! . . . But death—you understand—death! . . . Death has passed my way, and put this flower in my mouth: “A souvenir, my dear sir! Keep it! No charge! . . . I’ll be back this way a few months hence!” . . . (*A pause.*) Now you tell me, sir—whether, with a flower like this in my mouth, I can sit quietly at home there, as that poor woman would have me do! . . . (*A pause.*) I scream at her: “Yes! Yes! . . . Don’t you want me to kiss you?” . . . “Yes, kiss me!” she says. . . . And you know what she did, the other day? She took a pin and scratched her lip, and then seized me by the head and tried to kiss me—kiss me—here—on my lips—because she wants to die with me, she says! . . . (*A pause.*) Crazy woman! (*Then angrily*) But I refuse to stay at home! I’ve simply got to stand around, looking into the shop windows, admiring the deftness of the shop assistants! at the counters! . . . Because, you understand, if I should permit my mind one single idle moment—why, I might go mad, and destroy the whole of Life in someone I don’t even know. . . . I might pull out a revolver and shoot a person who never did me the least harm in the world! . . . I might shoot you, for instance—though all you’ve done, so far as I can see, is to have lost your train! . . . (*He laughs.*) Oh, no! No! . . . Don’t be afraid . . . I’m only joking! . . . (*A pause.*) Well—I

must be going. . . . (*A pause.*) At the very worst, I might kiss myself some day ! . . . (*A pause.*) But, you see, this is the fruit season, and I like apricots. . . . How do you eat them? Skin and all, I suppose ? Ah, that's the way ! . . . You cut them in halves, and you bring your two fingers together over them, and you suck in the juice, as from two lips you love, eh ? Yes, that's the way ! . . . How good they are ! . . . (*He laughs. A pause.*) Well, give my regards to your wife and daughters when you get back to the country ! (*A pause.*) I imagine them dressed in white and blue, sitting on the green grass in the shade of some tree . . . (*A pause.*) Do something for me to-morrow morning, when you get home, will you ? . . . I suppose the town, on its hill, will be some little distance from the station ? You'll get there about sunrise, and I'm sure you'd enjoy finishing your journey on foot. Well, the first tuft of grass you notice on the roadside—just count the blades for me ! The number of those blades of grass will be the number of the days I still have to live ! . . . (*A pause.*) Choose a good-sized clump, if you please, eh ? . . . (*He laughs.*) Well, good night ! . . . Good night ! . . .

[*He walks away, humming through his closed lips the tune that is being played on the distant mandolin. He heads at first towards the corner, R., but then, reflecting that his wife is probably there waiting for him, he turns around and walks off in the other direction.*]

THE OTHER *sits there gazing after him.*

CURTAIN

Arthur Schnitzler

GALLANT CASSIAN

*A Puppet Play*

TRANSLATED FROM THE THIRD EDITION OF THE ORIGINAL  
BY ADAM L. GOWANS

## CHARACTERS

MARTIN

SOPHY

CASSIAN

A VALET



SCENE: *A garret-room in the style of the seventeenth century. The outlook through the window is upon the roofs and towers of a small German town, and beyond, upon a hilly landscape, over which flows the ruddy glow of the evening sun.*

*The room is in some disorder. There is an open trunk; the wardrobe is open, and half emptied; linen and articles of clothing lie about on chairs. MARTIN is engaged in packing a travelling-bag, with SOPHY beside him.*

MARTIN: Don't cry, child,—don't cry.

SOPHY: Why, I am quite quiet.

MARTIN (*without turning round*): I hear by your breathing that you are crying.

SOPHY: Am I to help you?

MARTIN: Yes, you might do that. Look, in the wardrobe there—right on the top—there are some handkerchiefs lying.

SOPHY (*goes there*): New ones . . . silk ones . . .

MARTIN: Give them to me. Surely you don't object to my taking new silk handkerchiefs with me on my journey?

SOPHY: And the magnificent lace ruff! . . . So you bought it from the Persian merchant after all.

MARTIN: Certainly. Or did you want your sweetheart to be dressed like a workman on his travels? . . . Come, hand the ruff over to me. (*SOPHY brings it to him slowly. He points to the ruff.*) Is this not a tear again?

SOPHY (*artlessly*): Forgive me.

MARTIN: Well, well . . . (*Good-humouredly; he touches the ruff lightly with his lips.*) Now you see quite well that I am not angry with you. But *do* be calm, once and for all. Reconcile yourself to it, child. (*Busily working*) It's not for ever, you know.

SOPHY: I hope not, indeed.

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All applications for permission to perform this play should be made to Adam L. Gowans, 12 St. George's Road, Glasgow, C.3.

The play is published by Messrs. Gowans & Gray, Ltd., and may be obtained from Messrs. Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, at 2s. net (cloth bound).

MARTIN: Well then.

SOPHY: But how long? . . .

MARTIN: How long? Do you want to make me a liar against my will, child? I don't know how long.

SOPHY: March is at an end.

MARTIN: I know.

SOPHY: The violets were in bloom in the meadow outside the town-wall, when we were walking there the other day.

MARTIN: What of that?

SOPHY: Will you be back again when the elder-tree is in bloom?

MARTIN: Perhaps sooner . . . perhaps also a little later . . . Perhaps, after all, only when the cherries are ripe—how do I know? In any case I will come back, that is if I am still alive—and I hope I shall be.

SOPHY (*anxiously*): If you let them enlist you, Martin . . .

MARTIN: Enlist? . . . I have no intention of doing that. I have no desire to knock about here, there and everywhere. That is not in my line.

SOPHY: When once you are away! I have seen only too well how they are able to entice people, with cunning and trickery!—And your cousin Cassian, of whom you tell me so much, he is a soldier too, you know.

MARTIN: Gallant Cassian—yes, it's a different matter with him. When he was only thirteen years old, he killed two robbers . . . Oh, a human life is of no more value to him than the existence of a midge. He's a rare fellow!

SOPHY: I should very much like to meet him.

MARTIN: Cassian! . . . He's a hero! I wager, sooner or later he is made colonel, general . . . field-marshal . . . Why, if I were Cassian, I should have conquered a dukedom long ago. Indeed, we'll hear something of the sort soon, that's certain . . . To be sure, Gallant Cassian!—But I am a peaceful fellow and play my flute.

SOPHY: And if they offer you a handsome sum as earnest-money?

MARTIN: Earnest-money ? . . . Am I a beggar ?

SOPHY: Martin, if you go on as you are doing, there will soon not be much left of the ducats you won.

MARTIN: I shouldn't get very far with the thousand ducats. The miserable thousand ducats that I won from the students here ! The beggar-folk here in the town !

SOPHY: Do you know what they say ?

MARTIN: I can well imagine.

SOPHY: That you are in league with the Devil.

MARTIN: Brains and good luck are devilry to them. They must live out their astonishment !

*[Goes back and forward, performs his toilet.]*

SOPHY: O Martin, Martin !

MARTIN: What do you want ?

SOPHY: Stay at home, stay at home ! I have a presentiment that you will not remain true to me !

MARTIN (*taken aback*): Did I ever give you any occasion ?

SOPHY: After all, what do I know about you ? It was only last autumn that you came to our town, and on Christmas Day you kissed me for the first time.

MARTIN: Well, what next ? You've learned a lot of things since then !—

SOPHY: Was it your first kiss ? As it was my first kiss ?

MARTIN: That I can swear to you.

SOPHY: Martin ! . . . And did you kiss none of the beautiful women who danced the ballet here in the autumn ?

MARTIN: Not one.

SOPHY: Were you not in the theatre every evening ? Did you not wait late at night, till they went home—at the little door on the Town-hall Square ?

MARTIN: I knew none of them, I spoke to none of them.

SOPHY: And the flower that you scrambled for ?

MARTIN: Enough of these child's tales.

SOPHY (*more insistently*): What was she called, the one who threw you the flowers?

MARTIN: I don't remember.

SOPHY: She danced the captive maid of Athens that evening.

MARTIN: That may well be.

SOPHY: How plainly I see her before me now! Like quivering snakes in the snow her black locks clustered over her shoulders. All that saw her were mad with delight. And the Hereditary Prince threw red roses down to her on the stage . . . Oh, I remember it still! And later on hundreds waited in the street; and when she came, with the bouquet in her hand, they all hurrahd aloud, and she smiled, and looked round her, and scattered flowers among the crowd . . . And you, yes, you . . . you! you stooped down and ran after one and kept it—well I saw it!—in your bosom.

MARTIN (*puts his hand involuntarily to his breast. He throws a hasty glance at SOPHY, to see if she has seen*): Well, what of that? She is gone, I have heard nothing more of her.

SOPHY: But it makes me uneasy, Martin, to think that you could ever have forgotten and betrayed me for the sake of a woman like that.

MARTIN: Absurd nonsense! . . .

SOPHY: Remember, Martin, that those who travel about the world without a home are all false . . . however well they may dance or sing. And remember, that it would be a misfortune for you as well, Martin, if you forgot me!

MARTIN (*impatiently*): How late is it now?

SOPHY: The bell is ringing for vespers, Martin.

MARTIN: Three hours still! . . . Three long hours, till the mail-coach leaves.

SOPHY: Long? . . . long? . . .

MARTIN: Have I hurt you?

SOPHY (*bursting out*): Why . . . why are you going away?



MARTIN: How much oftener will you ask that foolish question? Because something drives me away . . . The rushing blood in me . . . the blossoming spring outside . . . Something new I want to see—men—cities! . . . The ceilings here worry me—the walls shut me in . . . no song will pass my lips any longer . . . (*Goes back and forward; sees SOPHY's uneasy gaze directed upon him.*) There's something so stupid about the last hour before departure! . . . Ought you not to go home, Sophy?—it is getting late.

SOPHY: If you wish, Martin, I'll go away at once.

MARTIN: Not because I want you to, but your mother . . .

SOPHY: I was to be allowed to stay out longer to-day. I wanted to accompany you as far as the post-house.

MARTIN: Is that so? . . . Very good, then. In that case we might have supper together.

SOPHY: Certainly.

MARTIN: Let us go.

SOPHY: Where?

MARTIN: I think to the river, as we did the other day,—to the Golden Swan Inn.

SOPHY: There——? . . .

MARTIN: Do you not wish to?

SOPHY: I should think not! . . . The soldiers there and students, that stare so rudely . . .

MARTIN: Oh, is that why? That won't trouble us much.

SOPHY: Were you not within an ace of falling on one another with your swords the other day?

MARTIN: It's not my fault. I won't allow anyone to look at you in an unseemly manner.

SOPHY: Would it not be cosier to stay at home?

MARTIN: It would be cosy, certainly. But there is nothing to eat here. Mrs. Bridget left this afternoon, and my valet will only come when it is time to carry the bag to the coach.

SOPHY: I shall fetch something myself.



MARTIN: Will you ?

SOPHY: A little cold meat, pastry, oranges and dates—will that suit you ?

MARTIN: You're a good child ! What will you find to do now all the evenings that I am away ?

SOPHY: Think of you . . . what else could I do !

*[Sorrowful embrace. It has become somewhat dark. Heavy steps on the stair. Both look up. CASSIAN enters, in fantastic uniform.]*

CASSIAN (*very loudly and violently*): Is this the right place ?

MARTIN: Cousin Cassian !

CASSIAN: Yes, it is I . . . Where does that voice come from ? . . . It is my cousin Martin's voice, that reaches me out of the darkness . . . Greeting to you, cousin Martin ! . . . And good evening to the beautiful young lady.

MARTIN: No matter how dark it may be, he sees at once if a young lady is beautiful.

CASSIAN: More shrewdness than sharp eyes . . . If it had been old Aunt Cordula, you would have lit the lamp long ago.

MARTIN: Light the lamp, Sophy, light the lamp ! That you may behold the playmate of my youth, my father's brother's son, Gallant Cassian, face to face !

*[SOPHY has approached CASSIAN and is looking at him. They gaze into each other's eyes. Then only does she light the lamp.]*

MARTIN: Where do you come from, Cassian ? . . . whither are you bound ? . . . how long are you staying ? . . . what brings you here ?

CASSIAN: Too many questions for one who is hungry, thirsty and tired.

MARTIN: In that case you must provide for three, Sophy. Bestir yourself a little—you know we have not much time . . . Cold meat, pastry, oranges, and dates—as you said.

CASSIAN: And did you say nothing of wine, madam ? I should be sorry if that were so.

SOPHY: I shall bring everything you wish.

MARTIN: Be back again soon !

SOPHY: Good-bye for the present.

[Exit SOPHY.

CASSIAN (*stretches himself on the bed*): Excellent ! Oh, one could rest here for four-and-twenty hours with pleasure !

MARTIN: If you like, you need not get up again. I am going on a journey.

CASSIAN: That's very fortunate. Then you will perhaps resign your room to me also for a night ?

MARTIN: As long as you please.

CASSIAN: Perhaps the young lady too, who is fetching supper for us ?

MARTIN: There ceases my right to dispose and yours to ask.

CASSIAN: Oho ! a year ago you would not have found so ready an answer.

MARTIN: And a year hence in place of answering at all I would perhaps have . . .

CASSIAN: Run me through with your sword. Let me rather say it myself, otherwise the result might be unfortunate. And that would be stupid, for I wish to remain good friends with you. Give me your hand.

MARTIN: You are welcome.

CASSIAN: Let me have a look at you. You have changed. Your shy, demure manner is gone . . . the town has formed you, it seems. Do you still go to church ?

MARTIN: Oh, Cassian, life itself has heaven and hell enough ! . . . What need have I of churches and priests ?

CASSIAN: Splendid ! splendid ! . . . What has come over you ? Have you stolen the crown from the Shah of Persia's dressing-table ? . . . do you drive away to-morrow in a gilded carriage with six white horses to Farther India ? . . . have you poisoned the Archbishop of Bamberg, and are they on your track ? . . . are you travelling to Africa to hunt lions ? . . . has the Sultan invited you into his harem ? . . .

or are you, in short, the fellow who not long ago, on the high road between Worms and Mayence, attacked the coach in which the beautiful Countess of Wespich and her beautiful daughter were sitting ? . . . was it you, in short, who hanged the coachman on a tree and got the two ladies with children, that came into the world the day before yesterday at the same hour ?

MARTIN: None of all these things.

CASSIAN: Ah—I have guessed: the girl who is fetching us dates and oranges is a princess in disguise.

MARTIN: She has nothing whatever to do with the matter !

CASSIAN: Deuce take it, there exists a person who is able to make me, Cassian, curious . . . and that person is my little cousin Martin !

MARTIN: Listen then ! . . . (*He takes a flower out of his doublet.*) That flower is from a woman to whom I have never once spoken, and whom I love like a madman. She was dancing here in the town in the autumn—she is called Eleonora Lambriani . . .

[*He staggers.*]

CASSIAN: What is the matter with you ?

MARTIN: I turn giddy, whenever I pronounce her name.

CASSIAN: Eleonora Lambriani ? . . . The mistress of the Duke of Altenburg ?

MARTIN: Once on a time !

CASSIAN: She who danced at night in the park of the château of Fontainebleau before the King of France and his officers without a veil—— ?

MARTIN: He's a blockhead, that does not understand that ! She was intoxicated by her own beauty.

CASSIAN: She who threw the Count of Leigang out of the window into the courtyard, so that the dogs fell upon him and tore off one of his ears—— ?

MARTIN: It was only one story high, and he has kept his other ear . . .

CASSIAN: She who once swore that for ninety-nine nights she would make a different lover happy each night, none of whom was to be anything less than a prince—who kept her oath and on the hundredth night fetched an Italian organ-grinder with his hurdy-gurdy into her bedchamber?

MARTIN: Yes, it is she, it is she! The miserable woman, the most splendid, most beautiful of women! And I will—I must have her! And then die!

CASSIAN: You will? Hum . . . It may happen that you get her for a groschen;—but it is also possible that she may ask ten thousand ducats for a kiss on her finger-tips. It is possible that she may tear her shift in twain at your first look of desire—but it may also happen that she sends you to fight against a thousand Turks before she permits you to burst open the buckle on her shoe.

MARTIN: I am ready.

CASSIAN: Do you know where she is staying at the present moment?

MARTIN: In Homburg. She is dancing there at the festivities that are taking place on the occasion of the meeting of the monarchs. And I shall be there to-morrow morning.

CASSIAN: Where have you buried your treasures?

MARTIN: They are still in the pockets of others to-day. But to-morrow before evening I shall be rich.

CASSIAN: How will you manage that?

MARTIN: Are you not aware that in Homburg at the celebrations all the gamblers of Europe congregate? . . . Whoever ventures to play with me, his riches are mine. A day is long when one has good luck. And in the evening I shall betake myself to the theatre, take a seat in the proscenium, see Eleonora dance, and afterwards wait before her door, lay my riches, my heart, and my life at her feet.

CASSIAN: And if she will have nothing to do with you?

MARTIN: At midnight I shall be a corpse.

CASSIAN: Your fancy flags too soon. At one o'clock in the morning I shall dance a minuet with her upon your grave and the Emperor of China shall watch us from a balloon.



MARTIN: You are right to make fun of me, Cassian, for you know only my hopes and wishes, but not my power and art. You do not know that I *must* win . . .

CASSIAN: Must ?

MARTIN: No matter how the dice fall—they fall for me.

CASSIAN: You are sure of that ?

MARTIN: As sure—as of my eyes and my hand.

CASSIAN: Have you tested it ?

MARTIN: Of course. At first I played with myself. When I was sure of my ground I invited friends, students like myself; one brought the other, all lost, and to-day all the money of the town is in my pockets. It is not very much, to be sure, a thousand ducats, but it is enough for outfit, journey, and the first stake.

CASSIAN: I am itching to try . . . Are you quite sure of your ground ?

MARTIN: Try and see, if you don't believe me ! Here are dice-boxes and dice; let us play.

CASSIAN: Splendid. (*Takes the dice-box in his hand.*) But what about the beautiful young lady who is fetching supper for us ?

MARTIN: Poor child !—You know, of course, Cassian, that, when I parted from you in the autumn and you rejoined your regiment and I entered the University, I was an innocent boy, I had never yet kissed a girl's lips, I had sworn love to none. Could I venture to approach Eleonora thus ? . . . I did not dare ! I learned to kiss in Sophy's arms, to her I swore the oaths that girls love to hear. I played the ardent lover, the jealous lover, the tender lover, and I know how to do as I like with a woman. There is a last experiment still to be made, that I may feel myself victorious and strong enough not to tremble before the adored one. Ere I leave the city, I shall tell her that I shall never see her again; and you must be witness how she will rush to this window to throw herself out.

CASSIAN (*shaking the dice*): Your stake, Cousin Martin !—What ? only a ducat ?



MARTIN: That is how I begin.

CASSIAN (*throws*): Three.

MARTIN (*throws*): Four.

CASSIAN: That was nothing very wonderful.

MARTIN: No more than I needed.

CASSIAN: Ten.

MARTIN: Eleven.

CASSIAN: Twelve . . . Ha ! you won't win this time !

MARTIN: Twelve.

CASSIAN: The deuce !—Eleven !

MARTIN: Twelve.—Come on !

CASSIAN: Come on ? I am done. I haven't a single heller left in my pocket.

[SOPHY *enters*.

CASSIAN: My dear madam, you see before you a man who is as poor at this moment as a church mouse . . .

MARTIN: I won't have you say that . . . Here, my friend, there is a ducat. I lend it to you willingly.

CASSIAN (*sticks it in his vest-pocket*): One never knows . . .

SOPHY (*lays the table, pours out wine*): Is it true, then, that he has a system with which he must win without fail ?

CASSIAN: It seems so . . . Thank you. Your health, young lady . . . Your health, Cousin Martin . . . Who would have foretold to me yesterday, that I would be sitting to-day in a friend's house at a table with the cloth laid ? . . . Why, what a pretty cap you have on, madam !

MARTIN: Upon my word, it is pretty. You did not have it on when you went away to fetch the supper.

SOPHY: I live so near, you see. I ran up to my room for a moment—one must get oneself up a little smartly, when one's sweetheart has such a distinguished visitor.

MARTIN: She knows what's the proper thing, doesn't she ?

CASSIAN: And what tastes good, not less. I swear that the truffle-pie, that I ate for breakfast at the Duke of Andalusia's, was wretchedly poor fare to this !

MARTIN: That is hardly possible . . . To tell the truth, it is a very modest inn the pie comes from, and the cook has probably never been out of the town . . . is that not so, Sophy ?

SOPHY: You are wrong, Martin. Seeing I was home in any case, I just ran across the market-place to the Pilgrim-Camel Inn—they have a cook there now, whom the Grand Duke of Parma drove out of the country, because he cooked so well that the princess wanted to marry him by hook or by crook.

CASSIAN: Long live the Grand Duke, the Princess, and the Pilgrim-Camel . . . and you, madam ! (*They drink.*)

CASSIAN: Delicious ! . . . I did not think that the wine-shops here were provided with such excellent wine.

MARTIN: There is no want of that in the town. And at the same time they are as cheap here as anywhere. Thirteen groschen a bottle—is that not so, Sophy ?

SOPHY: No, Martin. That is the best wine that they have in the Pilgrim-Camel. It costs a ducat a bottle.

MARTIN: The deuce ! Did they trust you on the strength of your face ?

SOPHY: No. I left the gold bracelet in pledge that you gave me the other day . . . Was I not right, seeing we have such a distinguished visitor . . . ?

CASSIAN: My thirst is good, the wine is better—but your kindness, madam, is better than thirst and wine. Permit me to kiss your hand, madam.

SOPHY: Don't call me "madam," please—you'll make me ashamed. My mother is a poor widow, and my father was in his lifetime a town blacksmith.

CASSIAN: Tell that to someone who understands less of the world and of womankind . . . Your father was no blacksmith.

SOPHY: I assure you, captain . . . my mother is an honest woman.

CASSIAN: We do not mean to doubt the fact, madam, that your mother has been virtuous to the best of her knowledge; but swear will I, that, while she bore you beneath her heart, she must have beheld the heathen goddess Venus in person, who may perhaps have appeared to her in a dream. Such a thing happens to the most honourable of women; I myself was invited to the dream of a woman of rank to whom a Moorish prince appeared, and who brought into the world a baby-girl as black as a raven!

*[Sound of bells.]*

MARTIN (*impatiently*): Supper! Time presses! . . . What? nothing more here? Why, Sophy, you have forgotten something after all, in spite of all your thoughtfulness!

SOPHY: Oh, no!

*[She brings an epergne with fruit.]*

CASSIAN: Splendid! . . . They smell as fresh as if they had just been plucked from the tree.

MARTIN: How did you get such magnificent fruit? . . . How has such splendid fruit come to this town?

SOPHY: It was an accident. I saw the epergne exhibited in Silvio Renatti's shop-window.

CASSIAN: It's beautiful enough to adorn a lord's table.

SOPHY: And that is what it was intended for. The Burgomaster receives the Prince of Dessau to-day, who is halting here on his journey to the camp . . .

MARTIN: Well? . . . am I the Burgomaster? . . . is this the Prince? . . .

SOPHY: No, he is not.

MARTIN: Or have I given you more ornaments than I remember, that you were in a position to pay for this epergne?

SOPHY: Oh, no. I paid this reckoning in a different way.

MARTIN: In what way, if I may be permitted to ask?—

SOPHY: The young Italian, who served in the shop, asked a kiss for it . . .

MARTIN: And you paid in that way?

SOPHY: Was I not right, since we have such a distinguished visitor?

CASSIAN: You have acted in an excessively noble and hospitable manner, madam. But I swear that even if this fruit has just come from warm Sicily, even if he who plucked it perished from sunstroke, even if he who brought it to Germany died of homesickness, even if Burgomaster and Prince turn mad with grief that they must do without such a dessert,—the insolent Italian has accepted payment a thousand times too high, and he shall pay me for it, before I leave the town . . . But now we must enjoy our repast.

[*They eat. SOPHY gazes at CASSIAN. MARTIN watches her. Silence. Then:*

MARTIN (*to CASSIAN*): And where, by the way, have you come from?

CASSIAN: Where from? . . . Shall I say in a few words or tell you the whole story?

MARTIN: In a few words, if you can.

CASSIAN: It is not so easy to relate. I come from a battle, in which two horses were killed under me and three caps shot from my head. In addition to that, I come from captivity, in which several brave comrades were starved to death and eaten by rats. Also from the place of execution, where seven were shot at my side and I was thrown for dead into a ditch along with them, although all the balls had whistled past me. Also from the clutches of a vulture that took me for carrion, like the rest who were preparing to rot at my side, and that let me fall upon the ground from the height of a mountain—fortunately upon a haystack. Also from a wood, where some merchants took me for a ghost and left behind them in their terror all sorts of good clothes and ready money. Also from a very merry house, where Croatian, Circassian and Spanish ladies flew at one another with their daggers because of me, and their gallants

tried to kill me, . . . so that I fled up the chimney on to the roof and jumped down five stories, . . . in a word: I come from so many adventures, that another would have had more trouble to invent them than it has given me to undergo them.

SOPHY: Splendid !

MARTIN: Marvellous ! . . . And you have escaped out of these thousand dangers—why, you were lucky !—without wounds ?

CASSIAN: I would say that, if I were a boaster; but, as I am not,—look !

SOPHY: I see nothing.

CASSIAN: What, madam, you do not see that the nail on my little finger is broken ?

[*He drinks. SOPHY gazes at him in astonishment.*]

MARTIN (*in growing annoyance*): We should know now where you come from, . . . but where are you going ?

CASSIAN: As soon as I have recovered from my injury, I shall rejoin my regiment.

SOPHY: Oh, I wish you would take me with you !

MARTIN: Are you mad, Sophy ?

SOPHY: What am I to do here now ? I'm sure a smart *vivandière* is well received everywhere in time of war.

CASSIAN: Your hand, madam,—shake hands over it, the thing is settled !

MARTIN: What have you mixed in her wine, Cassian ?

CASSIAN: What does it matter to you what the young lady does, when you yourself are going away on a journey ?

MARTIN: I advise you against it, Sophy,—I advise you against it. Think of your mother !

SOPHY: Is your regiment stationed far from here ?

CASSIAN: I should say it will be a journey of a day and a night, madam.



MARTIN: The deuce ! The deuce !

CASSIAN: What is the matter ?

MARTIN: I am impatient to know what is keeping my valet. I shall miss the coach !

CASSIAN: Do you find the time long ?—Come, cousin, I don't like idle quarter-hours either . . . Eh, let's have another little game !

MARTIN: What, with you ? . . . You forget that you haven't a heller left.

CASSIAN: Oho ! a rich cousin has lent me a ducat with which I may surely be allowed to do what I please.

MARTIN: On my soul, you may. And it will be a pleasure to me to take it from you, and your doublet, hose, sword and shirt into the bargain.

SOPHY: Martin, what are you thinking of, to treat your guest so shabbily ?

CASSIAN: Give me the dice !

MARTIN: A wretched stake,—a miserable stake !—I throw.—Twelve ! Surely the joke is at an end now.

CASSIAN: Why, I can do that too !—Twelve !

MARTIN: Ten.

CASSIAN: Eleven.

MARTIN: Two.

CASSIAN: Three.—All that ?

MARTIN: You see it. Perhaps you are afraid ?—Four.

CASSIAN: Five.

MARTIN: Eleven !—The luck is going to turn.

CASSIAN: Twelve.

MARTIN: Come on !

CASSIAN: That won't be enough now . . .

MARTIN: Don't be afraid ! . . . Here is my travelling-bag well packed ; there is more in it than you imagine ! (*They throw.*) Eleven !

CASSIAN: Twelve ! And it belongs to me.

MARTIN: Here is—my wardrobe ! . . . here is my bed . . . my bedding . . . You will be able to pay yourself ! Eleven.

CASSIAN: That will I . . . Twelve ! . . . I win ! And now enough.

MARTIN: Enough ? . . . One more . . . My valet will be here immediately . . . one more, it can't go on like this !

CASSIAN: What have you left to stake ?

MARTIN: Everything I have on my person, deuce take it ! . . . and my valet . . . and my place in the coach . . .

CASSIAN: It is not enough.

MARTIN (*indicating SOPHY*): And her as well !

SOPHY: Martin ! . . . I give myself away myself.

[*She sits in CASSIAN's lap and embraces him.*]

MARTIN: Scoundrel ! Scoundrel ! what have you mixed in her wine ? . . . Do you not hear ? I said " Scoundrel " !

CASSIAN (*rises*): Oh, is that what you mean !

MARTIN: Come on ! come on !

CASSIAN: Come, we'll settle matters outside the gate !

SOPHY: For Heaven's sake ! Cassian ! Cassian !

MARTIN: I have no time to go outside the gate. There is room enough here.

CASSIAN: As you please, cousin.

SOPHY: Cassian, am I to lose you again so soon !

[*CASSIAN laughs.*]

MARTIN: This is no time for laughing—come on ! come on !

[*They fight.*]

CASSIAN: Not bad ! You did that well . . . seven or eight years more, and you would be a dangerous opponent—not for me.

*[Runs him through the heart.]*

MARTIN (*sinks to the ground*): Alas ! alas !

SOPHY (*rushing over to CASSIAN*): And are you not hurt ?

CASSIAN: I am sorry, cousin Martin . . .

THE VALET (*comes*): Here I am, master.

CASSIAN: Your master stands here. Take the bag . . . So ! . . .

MARTIN: My eye grows dim ! . . .

CASSIAN: What was it you said, cousin Martin ? . . .

MARTIN: . . . the shadows of death . . .

CASSIAN: What was her name ? . . . Eleonora Lambriani . . . It would be worth while, to take one more day's leave . . .

SOPHY: Eleonora Lambriani— What is that ? The maid of Athens ! that was her name !—

MARTIN: Yes, wretch, wretch ! Just to let you know ! . . . Eleonora . . . here is the flower . . . I have kept it . . . it is the same . . . take it, cousin Cassian . . . carry it to her . . . I send her my greeting . . .

CASSIAN: By Heaven, I will give her your message and a number of others as well, which will afford her still more amusement !

SOPHY: What, you leave me for Eleonora Lambriani ?

CASSIAN: I cannot deny it. But not before to-morrow morning.

SOPHY: Alas ! . . .

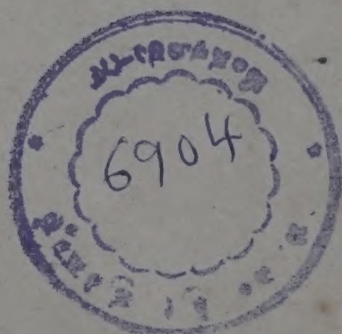
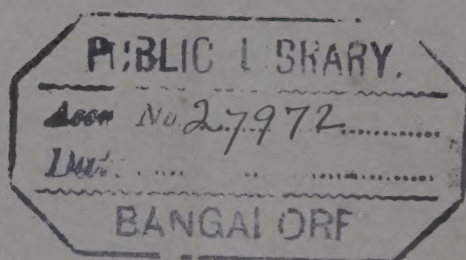
*[She hastens to the window and throws herself down.]*

MARTIN (*tries to follow her, falls to the ground*): Sophy ! Sophy !

*[CASSIAN throws himself out of the window after her.]*









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